NIH FOREIGN SCIENTIST PROGRAM

STUDY REPORT

VOLUME I

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TABLE OF CONTENTS
VOLUME I

EXHIBITS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary presents an overview of the NIH Foreign Scientist Program Study, conducted from October 2000 through February 2001, summarizes the study findings, and presents the study recommendations.

1.1 Overview

The Fogarty International Center (FIC) has the responsibility for operational administration of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Visiting Program, which provides opportunities for foreign researchers, exchange scientists, foreign guest researchers/special volunteers and foreign scientists to train and conduct collaborative research at NIH. The Visiting Program has grown from 150 participants in FY1968 to over 3200 in FY1999. During this time, the NIH Visiting Program has become proportionally more complex, and immigration laws and regulations have changed, making it increasingly difficult for the NIH to stay in compliance while maintaining exemplary customer satisfaction. Many changes, and significant program growth, have occurred since the last study of the Visiting Program, conducted approximately seven years ago.

The NIH Deputy Director for Intramural Research (DDIR), the Office of Intramural Research (OIR) and the Director, FIC, requested a review of the immigration and visa processes used by the NIH to recruit foreign scientists into its Intramural Research Program, and on a limited basis its extramural and other programs, for the purposes of training in, and conducting biomedical and behavioral research. A Foreign Scientist Programs Study group was established to define the objectives of the study and to recommend how to proceed with the study. A Foreign Scientist Programs Steering Committee comprised of the Executive Officer, FIC; NIH Management Liaison, Office of the Director (OD); Senior Advisor to the Deputy Director for Intramural Research; Director, Office of Human Resources Management, NIH; four NIH Scientific Directors and two key administrative staff was established to oversee the study. In addition, the Director of Duke University's International Program was asked to participate on the Executive Steering Committee.

1.2 Project/Tasking

The purpose of the study was to examine the entire NIH immigration and visa program and associated processes used to bring in, and possibly retain, foreign scientists, benchmark with best practices of other organizations and recommendation process improvements which would effectively and efficiently meet the needs of the NIH community. Specifically, DynCorp was tasked to review documents and interview key staff within FIC and the Institutes and Centers (ICs) and on the basis of that information:

- Assess the current type and level of staffing involved in the immigration/visa process, including a comparison of the International Services Branch (ISB) with the Immigration and Naturalization Service, other U.S. Government agencies, and non U.S. government

organizations providing immigration services. Benchmark for best practices with those organizations having similar programs.

- Analyze and determine the appropriateness of each of the functions within the immigration/visa process.

- Recommend the appropriate organizational location of the immigration function within the NIH; the FIC, the OD, OIR, decentralization of the ICs, or other location.

- Analyze all relevant delegations of authority, and make recommendations for further delegations (e.g., approval at the lab/branch chief level) when appropriate, to facilitate and streamline the process and reduce unnecessary clearances.

- Analyze and make recommendations for changes to all relevant NIH policies to facilitate and streamline the process.

- Analyze all relevant laws and regulations for feasibility in implementing streamlining measures.

- Assess office automation for potential improvements in helping to expedite completion of forms and letters, signatures, and workflow in an effort to make the new process as "paperless" as possible.

1.3 Background on the International Services Branch (ISB)

ISB serves all of the Institutes and Centers (ICs) at NIH by making it possible for foreign scientists to obtain visas and participate in the NIH Visiting Program. The 14 Immigration Specialists (ISs) in ISB are responsible for the processing of all initial visas for visiting program participants, as well as renewals/extensions, transfers, pay adjustments, and terminations through NIH as well as other federal agencies. However, in addition to these duties, the ISs are also responsible for numerous other duties related to providing advice and consultation to the IC administrative staff and to the foreign scientists, orientations for new scientists, preparing documents for travel, and more.

OIR plays a significant role in the Visiting Program by developing NIH-wide policies and standards for intramural research, training and technology transfer. Among its other functions, OIR has established policies related to the recruitment and appointment of visiting fellows and scientists, guest researchers and special volunteers. The ISB serves as OIR's implementation arm for the policies that relate to the Visiting Program.

Changes in immigration laws since the 1980's have made the work of the ISs increasingly more complex. In addition, the increase in the numbers of foreign scientists coming to NIH has resulted in a significant increase in workload for the ISs. With a total of 13 visa types used for nine program participant categories, NIH's Visiting Program is one of the largest and most complex in the federal government.

1.4 Study Findings

In line with the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) and various government initiatives to streamline procedures, one goal in evaluating NIH's visa process was to determine how the visa processes in ISB and the ICs could be made more efficient, while preserving the integrity of the NIH Visiting Program. What DynCorp found was that there is little need to reengineer the current visa process at NIH because, as a paper process, it works well. In reviewing the responses received from the interviews and focus groups and the limited data available, problems seem to be centered upon the fact that many of the sponsors in the ICs do not want to follow the process as it is currently set up at NIH, particularly regarding adhering to the lead times and in sending over complete packages to ISB. When compared to other organizations, the ISB lead time for visa processing is within the range of lead times given for the various types of visas used, and ISB is processing more cases per staff member than in other organizations with non-automated processing. However, the steps within the current process could be completed much more quickly and accurately if several policies were changed and processes were automated to eliminate the redundant entry of data onto multiple forms, and to allow for electronic entry, transfer and forwarding, and tracking of files to the maximum extent possible (including scanning capability).

DynCorp found that NIH issues a two year initial J-1 visa instead of the three year visa as permitted by J-1 regulations. This practice has been instituted to allow for an evaluation of a visiting fellow's performance before a third year is awarded. Based on responses from interviewees, many within NIH do not understand that the Title 42 fellowship award regulations only allow an award period of two years, so that fellowship awards could be terminated for nonperformance after two years, even if a fellow received a three year J-1 visa. If three year visas were issued, this would save about two man months of IS time. Other policies that were found to have a negative effect on the workload of the ISs were the inability of NIH to approve 4th and 5th year extensions of J-1 visas in house instead of through the Department of State (DOS), and the unnecessary duplication of effort by making both the ISs and the ICs responsible for review of diplomas and reference letters, and for the same data entry onto multiple forms.

At NIH, the responsibility for policy-making decisions related to the Visiting Program remains with OIR because these policies affect all of the ICs and they need coordination by one office. However, at NIH, ISB, as the implementation arm of the Visiting Program, is located in a Center (FIC). ISB currently has very limited interactions with the rest of FIC, however it has almost daily interaction with OIR. The organizational placement of ISB in FIC assumes that the underlying commonality is "international;" however, from a functional standpoint, its commonality is with OIR.

In contrast to other administrative functions, such as procurement, which have been largely decentralized to the ICs, as was recommended by a recent Arthur Anderson study, it is unlikely that Responsible Officer Authority for the J-1 program could be delegated to 20 or more Alternate Responsible Officers in the ICs. If decentralization were sought for the visa processing function, DynCorp believes this would jeopardize consistency in policy and standardization in products, and sacrifice expertise in visa rules and regulations. In the case of visas, noncompliance with regulations could result in deportation of foreign scientists, a serious consequence. The smaller ICs would not

have the staff to dedicate to this function and would still have to look to an outside unit to process cases for them.

ISB is currently structured in a customer-centric fashion, with three teams of ISs assigned by IC. DynCorp found that in the case of NIH, it is not the ICs that are different, but the visa types which dictate the level of service provided by the ISs. Each IS supports 200 foreign scientists, significantly more than for comparable organizations, and most other organizations either conduct group orientations or orientations are the responsibility of the sponsor. If NIH conducted group orientations, approximately 500 to 1000 man hours could be saved.

Interviews revealed that ISB has a negative image among sponsors and some foreign scientists because of a lack of understanding about why lead times are needed, and that many delays are caused by outside reviewing agencies or by incomplete packages submitted by ICs. ISB provides added value to NIH by saving an estimated $900,000 a year when compared to the cost of contracting out visa processing.

Currently, only the Key Contacts in the ICs receive training and Ecomms from ISB on visa processing. Since the secretaries in the ICs are responsible for putting the paperwork together for the visa packages, they need to receive the same training and information as the Key Contacts to understand why specific forms and dates are important. In addition, it was noted by several interviewees that lab chiefs/sponsors would also benefit from short training sessions that would provide information on visa basics and updates on visa rule changes.

As more and more foreign scientists come to work and train at NIH, quick and easy access to visa information will be needed to assist both the scientists and the sponsors at NIH on visa requirements and ISB's services. Currently, information about the NIH Visiting Program is found on two separate webpages – FICs and OIR's. They are neither linked nor cross-referenced. For FICs web site, DynCorp found many of the topics on the Administrative Information page to be inactive, and there are no links to other sites, such as the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for tax information. OIR's web site provides information in tabular format which contains little information about visa requirements. Yet another web site maintained by the Center for Information Technology (CIT) contains many of the forms used for the Visiting Program but again there are no references or links from the FIC or OIR pages.

Research from best practice organizations revealed that many of their web sites have web site indexes, with all topics active, and a search capability. These organizations use both tables and text to cover a wide variety of visa information, tax information, health insurance information and include a Frequently Asked Questions section. Best practice organizations make use of links and place pre-arrival and arrival/orientation information on the web, plus have a "News or Announcements" section to alert readers to new information. Further, the information provided is targeted for the foreign visitor and for the sponsor or Hosting Department.

Finally, DynCorp found that most best practice organizations have the database capability for generating performance management-type data for work planning and resource management as well as for program reporting.

1.5 Recommendations

As noted under Study Findings, DynCorp's objective throughout this study was to determine what works well in the current visa process at NIH while identifying areas that could be improved to ensure that each step in the visa process adds value. To this end, we believe the following recommendations capture the essence of streamlining initiatives and incorporate GPRA principles that are inherent in an effective visa process.

Recommendations related to ISB are organized by the following areas: (1) NIH policies, (2) ISB organization and staffing, (3) visa processing and automation, (4) communications, and (5) performance measurement. Section 5 of the Report contains additional discussion of each of the recommendations summarized below.

1.5.1. Recommendations on NIH Policies

1. Make all written policy documents related to the NIH Visiting Program and visa regulations and processing available on the web, thereby making them accessible to all parties in the ICs. Ensure that policies can be understood by the intended audiences, and are kept updated.

2. Policy documents should be updated so they are current. Information should be consolidated into the fewest possible number of documents, and cross-referenced, so it is easy to find all the relevant information about a specific issue.

3. Issue three year initial J-1's unless a Senior Investigator/IC specifically requests a one or two-year J-1. Per 42 CFR 61.13, fellowship awards would remain two year award appointments.

4. Submit a request to DOS for authorization for NIH to issue 4th and 5th J-1 renewals per Section 514.20.

5. Award/appointment letter should be signed by the ISB Branch Chief, or, an appointment letter signed by the IC and a separate letter relating to visa issuance, and accompanying the pre-arrival package, from ISB.

6. Shift the responsibility for entry and accuracy of the information on forms to the information "owner." Change the Form 829 to a two-part form. Part 1 should be completed

by the IC with the "program information." Part 2 should be completed by the foreign scientist with the "personal" information.

7. The IC should review resume, diploma, reference letters, etc. for compliance with NIH fellows requirements. Information on diploma, date, etc, is provided to ISB on the 829, and no 829/request should be sent to ISB until it is complete (all required information filled in). A cover memo from IC to ISB should document that the required documentation has been reviewed by the IC. This should be a form memo "shell" provided to the ICs by ISB for IC use.

8. When visa request packages are received incomplete, and when requested information is not forthcoming, advise the IC the request will be placed in an "inactive status" until the needed information is provided. After a reasonable period of time, if missing information is not provided, send incomplete packages back to the ICs.

9. Publicize the steps in the process to the ICs, and length of time each one takes, emphasizing non-NIH, non-ISB processing times. Also, publicize the policy for priorities in processing packages within ISB. For example, renewals take precedence over new appointees.

10. NIH's Office of General Counsel (OGC) should assign (and train) a lawyer to provide visa and immigration legal counsel to ISB. If NIH's General Counsel is unable to provide timely legal counsel, a law firm should be retained.

11. Approve/implement the current draft Manual Issuance which delegates Title 42 visiting program fellowship award authority to the Lab/Branch Chief level, paralleling the IRTA program.

1.5.2 Recommendations on ISB Organization and Staffing

1. Move ISB to an organization with more commonality of mission (i.e., involved with the visiting program or provider of basic support services that are required for NIH programs to function and prosper).

2. Keep ISB and visa processing and related functions as a centralized unit.

3. In conjunction with moving ISB to another organization, consider whether it should be at a higher organizational level, e.g., an "office" rather than a branch.

4. Restructure ISB to product teams to level the workloads among staff and facilitate more efficient processing. Product/service teams should consist of:

– J-1 visa team,

– H-1Bs, O-1s, and other visas team,
– Customer Service Team – conduct orientations, answer general questions (emails and phone calls), update the web site, conduct training for key cons, handle travel, and
– Support team – receptionist/secretary, office manager, data entry, etc.

In conjunction with restructuring to product teams, restructure training to start with J-1s, then move to H-1B,O-I team, and then to the customer service team. Final assignment would be based on branch needs, plus the individuals's preference.

5. Provide customer service training to ISs, particularly to the customer service team. Additional communications skills training should also be provided.

6. After other recommendations are implemented, review grading of IS positions, and ISB Branch Chief.

7. Improve ISB office administrative support. File supplies by type in specific areas, post locations, and do not change. Keep supplies re-stocked. Keep office machines fully operational. Hire a full time receptionist for the office. Review the position grade level.

8. Have the NIH Print Shop print collated packages or switch to sending electronic files, rather than paper, to new foreign scientists.

9. ISB should be moved to larger quarters. Staff members should have a minimum of 100 sq. ft per person, preferably 125 to 150 sq. ft, and 200 sq. ft for the Branch Chief, with additional space for files. Ideally, space for larger group meetings should be readily available.

10. To address IS workload issues, additional staffing should be provided. If NIH chooses NOT to automate visa processing, 2 to 4 additional IS FTE positions should be added. If NIH does automate visa processing, NIH should secure temporary help to bring down the backlog of cases to a manageable level.

1.5.3 Recommendations on Visa Processing and Automation

1. Develop and implement a single database and visa processing system which is linked to all the forms and letter or memo shells, so each data field item only needs to be entered once, and visa processing and form completion is automated, including the IAP-66.

2. Shift from one-on-one orientations to group orientations.

3. Continue to provide one tax seminar per month utilizing a contracted tax professional. Expand the contract scope of work to include having this tax professional assist with

determining tax treaty status and exemption from withholding eligibility in complex situations, for completion of the IRS Form 8233.

1.5.4 Recommendations on Communications

General Communications Recommendations

1. Develop a simple, clear mission statement and internal marketing document for ISB and publicize this throughout NIH to the Senior Investigators, Branch Chiefs, Lab Chiefs, Scientific Directors, AOs and Key Contacts to help manage customer expectations. This document should include:

- Information on the value that ISB brings to NIH's Intramural Research Program,
- Information on its services,
- Information on its processing priorities,
- Information on the rationale for lead times, including comparative processing times with other organizations

2. Develop and implement Service Level Agreements between ISB and the ICs which clarify rules and services to be provided, Customer Service standards, customer responsibilities, and problem resolution procedures.

3. For ICs which are particularly "problematic" (high percentage of packages arrive late, are incomplete, etc.), implement a "Partnering Initiative" effort with each IC and ISB.

4. After restructuring, institute and publicize a Branch policy regarding phone calls to ISs, reflecting the new organization.

5. Provide training to the ISs in oral and written communication skills , and also customer service skills (e.g., dealing with difficult people, or call center skills).

6. Develop "standard" prepared responses to the most frequently asked questions for use by ISs.

7. Focus and limit the information provided to a foreign scientist at any one time, particularly if that information is being provided verbally. Provide written summary sheets or instructions as appropriate for main topic/action/issue areas so the foreign scientists don't have to remember everything they are told during a meeting. Also, provide this information on the webpage.

8. Continue the use of Ecomms to "push" information out to the Key Contacts.

9. NIH should provide training on visa processing to Key Contacts and administrative staff in the ICs.

10. Leverage existing forums to provide critical information on visa processing. Short training sessions should be developed for lab chiefs to cover basics only or updates on visa rules.

Web-Specific Recommendations

1. Link the FIC and OIR webpages, or, if ISB is moved to OIR, place all information on the OIR site. There should also be a link to the Forms on the CIT web page.

2. Redesign the Visiting Program web page or pages (FIC/OIR) to include:

- Table of Contents
- Detailed visa information
- Links to other sites
- Pre-arrival/Arrival and Orientation information, and
- Announcements and News
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

3. Do not implement a self-subscribed listserv or Bulletin Board/chat room for foreign scientists or an anonymous listserv from FIC ISB to the scientists at the present time.

1.5.5 Recommendations on Performance Measurement

1. Send a report from the Executive Officer of FIC to the Executive Officer of each IC (preferably monthly, but no less than quarterly) showing the following data for all ICs, listed individually:

- Number of visa request packages received
- Number and percent of packages incomplete
- Number of packages placed in "inactive status" due to missing information, and length of time waiting for information
- Number and percent of packages "late"
- ISB visa processing statistics and processing times

2. In conjunction with development of the new database and visa processing system, ensure that performance measurement can be accomplished easily. Develop a suite of performance measures and associated reports, as well as the capability for ad hoc reporting.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Intramural research, that is research carried out within any of the laboratories or clinics of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is a principle vehicle for accomplishing the legislatively established mission of the NIH, which is to "acquire new knowledge to help prevent, detect, diagnose, and treat disease and disability." To foster collaborative research opportunities for U.S. and foreign scientists, NIH provides opportunities for the training of postdoctoral fellows, both foreign and domestic, and hires a number of foreign researchers as full time employees.

DynCorp was tasked to assess the efficiency of the process used by NIH to provide visa processing services for foreign scientists that come to work in the laboratories and clinics of the National Institutes of Health. This section of the report provides background on the history of the project and the methodology used by DynCorp to perform the study, and an outline of the report's content.

2.1 Report Content and Organization

The NIH Foreign Scientist Program Study Report consists of two volumes: Volume I contains study findings and recommendations; Volume II contains Appendices with reference material and detailed background and study findings.

Volume I contains five Sections. Section 1 is the Executive Summary. Section 2, Introduction, includes the history and purpose of the study, and the methodology. The use of both interviews and document reviews permitted DynCorp to form a composite picture of the roles, responsibilities and processes of both the FIC staff and the IC staff involved in visa processing. Background on the International Services Branch is contained in Section 3.0. Study findings are presented in Section 4.0, and Recommendations are presented in Section 5.0.

2.2 History of the Study

The Fogarty International Center (FIC) has the responsibility for operational administration of the NIH Visiting Program, which encompasses foreign researchers, exchange scientists, foreign guest researchers/special volunteers and foreign scientists coming to the U.S. The Visiting Program has grown from 150 participants in FY1968 to over 3200 in FY1999. During this time, the NIH Visiting Program has become proportionally more complex, and immigration laws and regulations have changed, making it increasingly difficult for the NIH to stay in compliance while maintaining exemplary customer satisfaction. Many changes, and significant program growth, have occurred since the last study of the Visiting Program, conducted about seven years ago.

The NIH Deputy Director for Intramural Research (DDIR), the Office of Intramural Research (OIR) and the Director, FIC, requested a review of the immigration and visa processes used by the NIH to recruit foreign scientists into its Intramural Research Program, and on a limited basis its extramural and other programs, for the purposes of training in, and conducting biomedical and

behavioral research. A Foreign Scientist Programs Study group comprised of: the Executive Officer (EO), FIC; Director, Division of Quality Management, Office of the Director (OD); NIH Management Liaison, OD; Senior Advisor to the Deputy Director for Intramural Research; Chief, International Services Branch (ISB), FIC; and an IC representative was established to define the objectives of the study and to recommend how to proceed with the study. A Foreign Scientist Programs Steering Committee composed of EO, FIC; NIH Management Liaison, OD; Senior Advisor to the Deputy Director for Intramural Research; Director, Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), NIH; four NIH Scientific Directors and two key administrative staff was established to oversee the study. In addition, the Director of Duke University's International Program was asked to participate on the Executive Steering Committee.

2.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the entire NIH immigration and visa program and associated processes used to bring in, and possibly retain, foreign scientists, streamline (when appropriate) and benchmark with best practices of other organizations in an effort to more effectively and efficiently meet the needs of the NIH community.

DynCorp was tasked by NIH's Office of Intramural Research and the Fogarty International Center to provide assistance in improving current visa processes by:

- Assessing the current type and level of staffing involved in the immigration/visa process, including a comparison of the ISB with the Immigration and Naturalization Service, other U.S. Government agencies, and non U.S. government organizations providing immigration services. Benchmark for best practices with those organizations having similar programs.

- Analyzing and determining the appropriateness of each of the functions within the immigration/visa process.

- Recommending the appropriate organizational location of the immigration function within the NIH; the FIC, the OD, OIR, decentralization of the ICs, other.

- Analyzing all relevant delegations of authority, and making recommendations for further delegations (e.g., approval at the lab/branch chief level) when appropriate, to facilitate and streamline the process and reduce unnecessary clearances.

- Analyzing and making recommendations for changes to all relevant NIH policies to facilitate and streamline the process.

- Analyzing all relevant laws and regulations for feasibility in implementing streamlining measures.

- Assessing office automation for potential improvements in helping to expedite completion of forms and letters, signatures, and workflow in an effort to make the new process as "paperless" as possible.

Thus, this report will not address what types of visas are more appropriate to use in certain circumstances, or recommend that NIH pursue new types of visas. The study parameters did not permit DynCorp staff to perform detailed evaluations of job descriptions or personnel classifications.

2.4 Methodology Used for the Study

To assess the appropriateness of the current immigration function at NIH, DynCorp relied heavily on document reviews, individual interviews, meetings, and focus groups with key NIH staff. Beginning on October 16, 2000, DynCorp participated in the first Steering Committee meeting. This meeting was intended to allow DynCorp to meet the members of the Steering Committee and to hear first hand their proposed areas for the study focus. The following week, DynCorp attended the official kickoff meeting for the study with staff from FIC and OD's Division of Quality Management. DynCorp was presented with a written list of potential areas for investigation as part of the study, as discussed at the earlier Steering Committee meeting. DynCorp requested from FIC/ISB staff specific documents relating to the NIH Visiting Fellows/Foreign Scientist programs and visa processing within NIH. In addition, DynCorp also received several process flow charts from the Division of Quality Management on the "as is" visa process within FIC for various types of visas.

In the weeks that followed, DynCorp reviewed the information provided by FIC, and conducted interviews of the following NIH staff:

- Senior Advisor to the Deputy Director for Intramural Research,
- Branch Chief and Deputy Branch Chief, FIC,
- Deputy Director for Intramural Research,
- Director of FIC,
- Executive Office/Director of the Office of Administrative Management and International Services, FIC,
- Several Immigration Specialists in FIC.

Interviews of these individuals lasted anywhere from one half hour to three hours each. Interviewees were not provided with copies of the questions in advance. Questions were designed to obtain feedback on "big picture" issues from managers in several key areas: the role of FIC and the ICs with regard to visa processing, NIH policies, FICs budget, and the organizational placement of FIC. Questions posed to several Immigration Specialists who could not attend the focus group session were identical to those questions used in the focus group session. These questions focused more on their day-to-day activities and workload issues.

In addition, DynCorp conducted focus group sessions with Visiting Fellows, Staff Scientists, Senior Investigators, Tenure Track Scientists, Immigration Specialists, and Key Contacts within seven Institutes/Centers. Approximately 44 individuals participated in these focus groups. For all of these groups, an email message which informed individuals of the purpose of the project was transmitted by either FIC or OIR. The email messages solicited the voluntary participation of individuals in the focus groups. Questions for the focus groups were provided in advance via email to those individuals who agreed to participate. The focus group sessions lasted approximately two hours each. In addition, a draft schematic diagram outlining the steps involved in the process for packaging visa requests within the IC was provided to the Key Contacts and to the Senior Investigators for review. Individuals in these groups were asked to write their comments on the draft process flow diagram and fax it back to DynCorp. Copies of the interview questions used for the focus group sessions can be found in Volume II, Appendix 1.

In addition to conducting focus group sessions and interviews, DynCorp reviewed a wide array of documents provided by ISB's Deputy Branch Chief. A comprehensive bibliography of those sources is contained in Volume II, Appendix 2.

As part of this study, DynCorp identified a number of government organizations with visiting programs, universities with large international programs and medical schools, and private sector and nonprofit organizations processing visas. The purpose was to compare other organizations' programs and processes to NIH, and identify best practices which NIH could consider adapting to its own Visiting Program. The organizations were interviewed either in person or via phone. In some cases, several units or persons in an organization were interviewed to provide a broad perspective and detailed, specific information on different aspects of the program (e.g., visa processing versus the specifics of the database and automated system used). The following organizations were interviewed:

Government Organizations:

- U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- National Air and Space Administration (NASA)
- National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)
- National Science Foundation (NSF)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- U.S. Information Agency (USIA)
- U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
- U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)

Private Sector and Nonprofit Organizations:

- American Council on International Personnel (ACIP)
- American Institute for Foreign Study Foundation (AIFSF)
- Delphi International,

- General Atomics (GA)
- Institute for International Education (IIE)

Universities:

- Duke University
- Georgetown University
- Harvard University
- Johns Hopkins University
- Stanford University
- Tulane University
- University of California at Berkeley
- University of Michigan

Government organizations were chosen based on USIA Working Group Foreign Visitor Program Annual Report data, and discussions with USIA and DOS. Universities and private sector organizations were selected based on discussions with USIA and other government agencies, Duke University, and Internet research on visiting programs. Best practices were identified in several organizations, and comparative data was obtained on staffing, use of automation, type and volume of visas processed, performance measurement, and lead time and process time.

General comparative information and best practices are cited in relevant sections of this report. Copies of the interview questions used for the comparative research organizations can be found in Volume II, Appendix 3. Interview notes on each organization are contained in Volume II, Appendix 4, and a summary comparison table showing how each organization compares to ISB is contained in Volume II, Appendix 5.

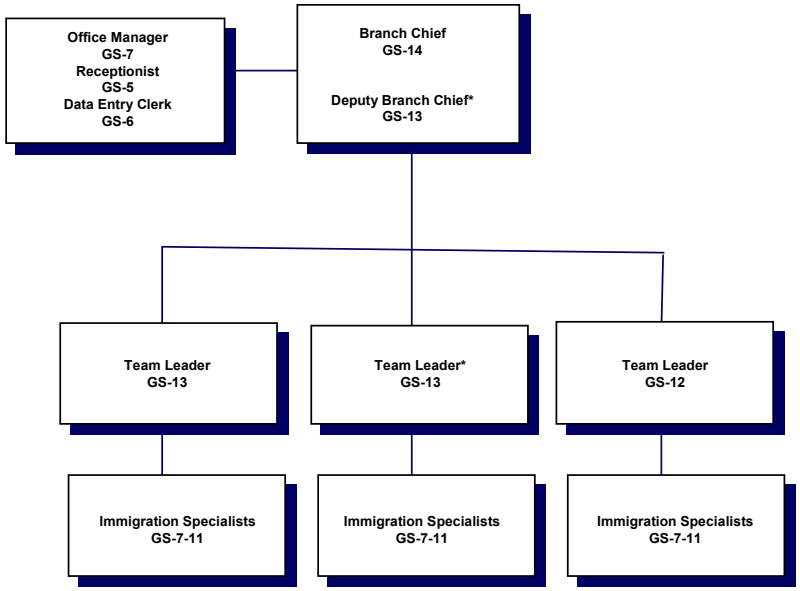
DynCorp also reviewed a large number of web sites providing foreign visitor and visa program information to identify potential enhancements to the FIC/ISB and OIR Visiting Program web sites. Web sites reviewed included over 20 universities, various private sector organizations providing visa information (law firms, nonprofits, etc.), and government organizations such as IRS (for tax information) and DOS, Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) and USIA. Examples of pages from the best sites are contained in Volume II, Appendix 5. Volume II, Appendix 7 presents a comparison of NIH and university web sites.

On December 4, 2000, the Steering Committee held its second meeting at which time DynCorp submitted a brief summary of its progress on the study objectives. The third Steering Committee meeting was held on February 5, 2001, and DynCorp presented a briefing on the written findings and recommendations contained in this draft report.

3.0 BACKGROUND ON THE INTERNATIONAL SERVICES BRANCH

The International Services Branch (ISB) of the Fogarty International Center (FIC) is organizationally located in the Office of Administrative Management and International Services (OAMIS) of FIC. OAMIS provides administrative, budget and personnel support for all of FIC, including domestic visa and passport services for NIH scientists traveling abroad. ISB serves all of the Institutes and Centers (ICs) at NIH by making it possible for foreign scientists to obtain visas and participate in the NIH Visiting Program. Exhibit 1 shows the organizational structure of ISB and its staffing and grade levels.

Exhibit 1: Organizational Structure of ISB
(as of October 2000)



***Note: The Deputy Branch Chief is currently "double-hatted" and serves as one of the Team Leaders.**

The 14 Immigration Specialists (ISs) in ISB are responsible for the processing of all initial visas for visiting program participants, as well as renewals/extensions, transfers, pay and stipend adjustments, and terminations through NIH as well as other federal agencies. In addition to these case processing services, ISs provide the following services:

- Advice and consultation to foreign scientists regarding maintenance of visa status, health insurance and stipend/salary;
- Advice and consultation to IC administrative, personnel, and scientific staff involving hiring and retention of the visiting foreign scientist;
- Conducting orientations for newly arrived foreign scientists;
- Preparing documents for travel for the primary visa holder and/or dependents;
- Meeting with foreign scientists to review documents for travel and to sign Form IAP-66
- Resolving INS-related problems;
- Preparing changes of nonimmigrant status;
- Preparing permanent residence petitions for individuals designated as tenure track;
- Conducting meetings with IC sponsor, foreign scientist and administrative staff on the preparation of (1) waiver applications, and (2) supporting documentation for O-1 and permanent residence petitions;
- Analyzing and advising ICs on waiver applications; providing final review of applications and forwarding to DHHS Exchange Visitor Waiver Review Board;
- Preparing financial change documentation for Visiting Fellows (e.g., stipend increase, family arriving late and obligation of any necessary funds);
- Maintaining an immigration file on each visiting foreign scientist at NIH;
- Maintaining the electronic databases on all visiting foreign scientists (e.g., master file, tickle track, IAP tracking); and
- Conducting Key Contact informational meetings.

Responsibility for NIH's Visiting Program is shared by the Office of Intramural Research (OIR) in the Office of the Director. OIR's responsibility is to develop and implement NIH-wide policies and standards for intramural research, training and technology transfer. Among its other functions, OIR has established policies related to the recruitment and appointment of visiting fellows and scientists, guest researchers and special volunteers. The ISB serves as OIR's implementation arm for the policies that relate to the Visiting Program.

In the mid-1980's, the ISB was led by a Branch Chief and a GS-9 supervisor. The Immigration Specialists (or Program Assistants, as they were called at that time), ranged from GS-5 to GS-7. The type of visas that the program assistants handled was based on their GS level. The GS-5 ISs handled visas for fellows, guest researchers, and volunteers; the GS-6s also processed employee visas and ECFMG cases, and the GS-7s handled H visas in addition to all the other types. The GS-9 supervisor also handled a caseload. The Branch Chief processed permanent resident petitions and waivers.

In 1988, a new Branch Chief was hired to manage ISB. This individual created the electronic log which is still in use by the agency. The previous Branch Chief was re-assigned to a new position as Immigration Coordinator. The Immigration Coordinator maintained most of the knowledge in the agency concerning immigration laws and regulations.

In 1990, NIH created a new supervisory position over the Immigration Specialists. This supervisor managed a caseload and conducted training of the new ISs. At this time, the agency experienced a significant amount of turnover of the ISs due to workload requirements and low GS grade levels.

To deal with the workload, ISB went into "emergency status": it would literally turn off its phones in the afternoon to allow the ISs time to process their cases.

In 1995, the IS positions were professionalized and a team structure was established. The grade levels for the ISs were elevated to a GS-7, GS-9 or GS-11. Team Leader positions were established at the GS-12 level. At this time, the Immigration Coordinator retired, and those duties were assumed by Branch Chief and Team Leaders. The Branch Chief position was changed to a GS-14, and a GS-13 Deputy Branch Chief position was created. About this same time, ISB was organizationally assigned within the Office of Administrative Management and International Services (OAMIS), FIC.

Changes in immigration laws over the same time period made the work of the ISs increasingly complex. In 1991, wage certifications and Labor Condition Applications (LCAs) were required for the H visa, and the cap on H-1B visas at was removed in 2000. It was also in 1991 that the O-1 visa was first used within NIH. The J-1 regulations were revised in 1993, to a "standard" period of three years rather than the previous five years. Those individuals already in NIH's visiting program on J-1s were "grandfathered," and allowed 5 year visas through NIH. Thus, since 1995, NIH has had to apply to DOS/USIA requesting extensions for a fourth and fifth year on each J-1 visa. Initially, the USIA was denying many of the J-1 extension requests. Therefore, the ISB Branch Chief solicited the assistance of NIH's OIR to get the five year program reinstituted. As a result of meetings between USIA and NIH, the J Visa Extension Review Committee (JVERC) was established at NIH to review 4th and 5th year research and visa extension requests prior to submission to USIA. Since the establishment of the JVERC, many J-1 research scholars have been able to stay for five years on a J-1 visa; they must return to their home country after this to fulfill the two year home residency requirement.

As a result of these changes, the staff of ISB has experienced a significant increase in workload over the last ten years. While the earlier study (1993) of ISB found no need for additional staff, one additional FTE was provided to ISB by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in FY2000. NCI hosts the greatest number of visiting scientists – almost one-third of the foreign scientists at NIH. This additional FTE was provided to offset the additional workload due to an anticipated increase in NCI's participation in the visiting program, and the transfer of staff from a contractor to federal employment. Exhibit 2 shows the number of foreign scientists in each visa type as of October 19, 2000.

Exhibit 2. Foreign Scientists By Visa Type, as of October 19, 2000

Visa Type	Number	General Description
J-1	1841	Exchange Visitor, Visiting Fellow
J-2	49	Spouse or dependent of J-1
H-1	191	Temporary Worker

Visa Type	Number	General Description
O-1	95	Alien of Extraordinary Ability
TN	72	NAFTA (Canadians or Mexicans)
EA	65	Employment Authorization
F-1	49	Student
B-1	30	Visitor for Business (usually short-term)
PR	9	Permanent Resident
WB	3	Visitor for business, pilot waiver program
G-4	3	Employee of International organization
A-2	2	Employee of foreign government (or dependent)
A-1	1	Diplomat or dependent
TOTAL	**2414**	

Exhibit 3 shows the number of foreign scientists in each NIH Visiting Program category. This data is taken from the ISB "Master File." With a total of 13 visa types used for nine program participant categories, NIH's Visiting Program is one of the largest and most complex in the federal government (see Volume II, Appendix 5).

Exhibit 3. Foreign Scientists by NIH Program Type, as of October 19, 2000

NIH Program	Number	Description
VF	1558	Visiting Fellow: all categories, including pre- and post-doctoral and Supplemental
VS	487	Visiting Scientist
VL	213	Special Volunteer
VA	55	Visiting Associate
ES	44	Exchange Scientist
GR	31	Guest Researcher
PS	18	Professional Services Contract
EX	7	Special Expert

NIH Program	Number	Description
IF	1	International Research Fellow
TOTAL	**2414**	

Exhibit 4 presents the growth in the NIH Visiting Program over the past six years – it shows the totals of program participants over each year (note that this number is higher than the "Snapshot" number provided in the previous Exhibit tables, reflecting the turnover in program participants over the course of a year).

Exhibit 4. Trend by Fiscal Year for NIH Visiting Program Category (Total over the FY)

Program Category	FY 94	FY 95	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99
Visiting Fellows	1,394	1,449	1,477	1,535	1,560	1,748
Visiting Associates	540	464	466	478	481	338
Visiting Scientists	302	280	266	237	222	367
NIHVP TOTAL	2,236	2,193	2,209	2,250	2,263	2,453
GR and VL	638	642	663	622	621	530
Other Programs	275	270	255	281	292	262
TOTAL	3,139	3,105	3,127	3,153	3,177	3,247

4.0 STUDY FINDINGS

NIH has the one of the largest and most complex Visiting Programs/ foreign scientist programs in the government. It is also larger and more complex than most universities and most private sector organizations. NIH utilizes 13 different visa types. There are nine major categories within its visiting program, including Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) as well as training/non-FTE positions. Distinctions between tenure and nontenure track further complicate the NIH Visiting Program, as does the requirements for physicians depending on patient contact.

In line with GPRA and various government initiatives to streamline procedures, one goal in evaluating NIH's visa process was to determine how the visa processes in ISB and the ICs could be made more efficient, while preserving the integrity of the NIH Visiting Program. What DynCorp found was that it is difficult to make suggestions for reengineering the current visa process at NIH because, as a paper process, it works well. When compared to other organizations, ISB processing is within the range of lead times for the various types of visas used, and is processing more cases per staff member than in other organizations. In reviewing the responses received from the interviews and focus groups, problems seem to be centered upon the fact that many of the sponsors in the ICs do not want to follow the process as it is currently set up at NIH, and the steps within the current process could be completed much quicker if processes were automated to eliminate the redundant entry of data onto multiple forms, and to allow for electronic transfer/forwarding/tracking of files to the maximum extent possible (including scanning capability).

Findings related to the NIH Visiting Program and visa processing are organized by the following areas: (4.1) NIH policies, (4.2) organization and staffing, (4.3) visa processing (4.4) communication, and (4.5) performance measurement. Findings from the comparative research are presented in each of these section as appropriate. Detailed information on the comparative research is contained in Volume II, Appendices 4 and 5.

4.1 NIH Policies

This study focused specifically on NIH policies relating to the Visiting Program, which NIH could change, rather than on federal visa regulations, which NIH cannot change. Those policies that can be changed by NIH and that received a significant amount of discussion in the focus groups, were scrutinized by DynCorp staff. This included those policies that affect overall processing time for visas, as well as delegations of authority. In addition, DynCorp reviewed federal visa regulations to determine where NIH could request delegation of authority or other programmatic changes from Department of State in accordance with current regulatory provisions. The study did not address regulatory changes which NIH might want to pursue, such as development of a new visa category for scientific research.

4.1.1 Policy Manuals; Organization and Availability

Policies and procedures relating to the Visiting Program are not found in a single source, but distributed among several manuals, handbooks, and electronic media (e.g., web site). Many policies and procedures are out-of-date; some are in the process of revision. There is no easy way to locate all the information pertaining to a particular issue.

Policies and procedures governing the NIH Visiting Program address both NIH use of the various visa types and implementation of visa regulations, as well as internal NIH visiting scientist program categories. As noted, there are 13 different visa types used by NIH, and nine major foreign scientist programs at NIH. There is not a simple correlation between visas and NIH visiting program categories. And, programs such as the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science, the Fulbright program, and the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates, also have NIH policy and procedural implementation requirements. This makes the development, promulgation, approval, updating, organization and dissemination – not to mention understanding – of these policies and procedures very complex and time consuming.

At NIH, policies related to the Visiting Program are distributed among several different documents. Somewhat outdated information relating to program requirements and procedures can be found in the NIH Manual, Sections 2300-320-03, and 2300-320-04. These sections date from 1987. Information related to Intramural Research Program Personnel policies can be found in OIR's Intramural Research Sourcebook. This information, which is updated frequently, covers the Tenure Track policies, the five year/eight year rule, and Visa and Permanent Residency Requirements. In addition to these sources, Delegations of Authority for Title 42 Personnel Appointments remain in a separate document dating from 1996; this document is currently being updated.

ISB developed an IS Handbook for ISs several years ago. Because ISB could devote only limited time and resources for development, the Handbook does not contain all the needed information – it is a good, but only partial, reference source. It has also not been updated; like other policy and procedure documents, staff time is not available for this "lower priority" work.

In the ICs, Key Contacts maintain their own handbooks related to the Visiting Program and each visa type. These reference sources may also be used by administrative assistants or secretaries in labs and branches who actually complete the NIH 829 forms and visa request packages.

Finally, FIC ISB issues Technical Advisories; most of these are posted on the FIC web site. Some of the Technical Advisories are outdated and are being revised.

Several interviewees expressed the desire to see all of the policies, rules and program requirements in one sourcebook that could be used by both the IC staff and ISB staff.

4.1.2 J-1 Visa Policies

Many of the NIH policies explain the authority provided to NIH for its J-1 Visitor program from USIA or the rules and exceptions governing the different visa categories from the Department of State (DOS). As noted earlier, these policies cannot be changed by NIH managers alone, and therefore, changes or improvements to these policies were deemed outside of the scope of this study. There are, however, several J-1 policies instituted by NIH that should be reviewed due to their negative affect on the workload of the ISs. This appears to be because of a difference between J-1 visa regulations and Fellowship program regulations.

The J-1 program regulations (Title 22 CFR Section 514.20) permit scientists to come to NIH for three years, and J-1 visas to be issued for three years. NIH also has the authority to grant a terminal six month extension without DOS approval, and since 1996, NIH can request a one-time extension for a fourth and fifth year from DOS. This extension must be reviewed by the JVERC before submission to DOS. Upon expiration of the J-1 visa, the scientist is required to return to his or her home country for two years.

> "TITLE 22 CFR 514 – Current regulations governing all aspects of the Exchange Visitor Program. Subpart B – Specific Program Provisions Sec. 514.20 Professors and research scholars.
> (I) Duration of participation. The permitted duration of program participation for a professor or research scholar shall be as follows: (1) General limitation. The professor and research scholar shall be authorized to participate in the Exchange Visitor Program for the length of time necessary to complete his or her program, which time shall not exceed three years."

However, the Title 42 regulations governing fellowships, including visiting program fellowship awards, stipulate a fellowship award period may only be two years.

> "TITLE 42 – PUBLIC HEALTH PART 61 – FELLOWSHIPS – Subpart A– Regular Fellowships Sec. 61.13 Duration and continuation. An award period may be any period not in excess of two years. The Surgeon General may make one or more continuation awards for an additional period upon a finding of satisfactory progress toward accomplishment of the purposes of the initial fellowship award. Additional support may be provided on appropriate justification after expiration of the period of support involved in the previous award."

The Title 42 Fellowship program delegations contained in the NIH Manual Issuance delegate the award authority, and award continuation authority, to the Scientific Director (SD) level (and the current draft further delegates this authority to the Lab. Branch Chief level).

Even though NIH is permitted to grant an initial three year J-1 visa to scientists under its J-1 program, most of its J-1s are currently issued for two years – the same length of time as the initial fellowship award. Anecdotal information from focus groups and interviews indicate that most people in the ICs, and even ISB staff were not clear on the distinction between the authorized visa issuance period compared to the fellowship period, and believed that if a three year visa was issued, ICs would have to go through a termination process if a fellow was not performing. Since fellowships, per Title 42, may only be initially awarded for two years, this should not be an issue even if the J-1 visa was issued for three years; i.e., the visa could be terminated if a fellowship award was not extended past the initial two years. In addition, NIH has an early termination policy which was created several years ago. In cases of unsatisfactory performance, it requires the Lab/Branch Chief to provide notice of the termination at least 11 or 12 months in advance, and in cases of incompatibility, to negotiate a transfer for the fellow to another IC.

The current database can only provide information about the total number of J-I visa holders at NIH, and not how many are initial appointments, 3rd year extensions, or 4th and 5th year extensions. ISB staff estimated that a significant number (well over 50%) of J-1 visa holders are extended for the 3rd year. According to ISB, about 500 to 600 new J-1s are processed each year, and over 300 to perhaps as many as 550 3rd year extensions are processed by ISB each year. If three year appointments could be made, DynCorp estimates that this would result in a savings of about two man-months.

With regard to the 4th and 5th year J-1 extensions, ISB estimates that approximately 150 per year are reviewed by the JVERC Committee and approximately 10 are denied. (The functioning of the JVERC Committee was not reviewed as part of this study.) The J-1 Visa Extension Review Committee (JVERC) was established in 1996 to review requests submitted by a Scientific Director for extensions of a J-1 visa beyond the third year. NIH is permitted to request extensions for a 4th or 5th year from the DOS, which authorizes the J-1 visa program. Fellows must submit a request for extension to the JVERC committee no later than 120 days prior to the expiration of the Form IAP-66. If the fellow has a J-2 spouse who works, the package must be sent to the JVERC committee no later than 180 days prior to expiration. Once the JVERC committee approves the request, it must go to DOS for approval. FIC/ISB estimates this approval takes between one to two months. Among the other best practice organizations contacted, USAID requested and received authority for five year J-1s from DOS per Section 514.20.

4.1.3 Title 42 Delegations

Based on a review of the Title 42 delegations, it appears that NIH has recognized the need to empower its employees with the requisite authority and responsibility related to the appointment, extension and selection of visiting program participants. The IC Directors and Scientific Directors, who are of course more knowledgeable about the research to be performed and the qualifications of specific candidates, have been delegated the decision-making authority for selections, extensions and appointments. In a few ICs, the Director has

chosen not to delegate these decisions. In the Intramural Research Training Award (IRTA) program, similar award authority has been redelegated to the Lab/Branch Chief; the current draft Manual Issuance (for the Visiting Program) which is currently under review follows the IRTA program with redelegation to the Lab/Branch Chief level. If implemented, this might expedite review and approval within ICs. As noted in the previous section, this delegation would apply to both the initial two-year fellowship award appointment and any subsequent continuation.

4.1.4 Appointment Letter

Every appointment package that is mailed to a new foreign scientist notifying him or her of their acceptance into the Visiting Program is accompanied by an award/appointment letter that is currently signed by the Director of FIC. This is a common practice and other best practice institutions vary as to who signs their letter, either the funding organization head (e.g., Lab or Center Director) or the International office.

In NIH's case, the FIC Director has traditionally signed the appointment letter based on the visibility of the Visiting Program. This often results in the delay of the package being mailed to the scientist by one to three days. Although this practice also ensures that the appointment letter is accurate and has no typographical errors, this responsibility is more properly placed with the Chief of ISB who will ultimately be the party that is contacted by the scientist if he or she has questions. If the appointment letter focuses on the fellowship award, signature of this letter could parallel the delegation of the fellowship award per 42 CFR Part 61, with the effective date being two years from the date of issuance of the J-1 visa or IAP-66. An additional letter from ISB, signed by the Branch Chief (in RO capacity), could be included, focusing on the IAP-66 and the J-1 visa.

4.1.5 Policies Relating to Information Ownership and Information Verification

At NIH, Visiting Program Forms (e.g., 829 and 590) and associated visa request packages are usually compiled by an administrative person or secretary within a Lab or Branch. Information is gathered from the sponsor, and from the foreign scientist. The package is sent to the Key Contact of the IC for a review, and then sent to ISB. ISB is expected to verify all of the information in the package to insure accuracy and completeness – not only the visa requirements, but also the personal information about the visiting scientist, as well as the programmatic information, such as the resume, diploma, diploma translation and letters of reference.

In most other organizations reviewed, the actual responsibility for providing information and completing the visa request forms rests with the individual who "owns" the information or is responsible for the program area. Best practice organizations have visitors provide their own personal information by completing/filling in one part of a two part form, usually using electronic or on-line forms. The visa center is not expected to check or verify this

information; rather they focus on information related to visa requirements. Volume II, Appendix 11 presents a comparison of the NIH Form 829 with several Universities' Visa Request Forms.

Similarly, in best practice organizations, departments or sponsors provide program information on a second part of the visa request form. Immigration regulations do not require that J-1 packages to contain diplomas, resumes, or three current letters of reference, these are NIH fellowship program requirements. Accountability for review of these documents and determination that the individual meets the Visiting Fellow programmatic requirements should be placed with the ICs who have more familiarity with their content, and who are responsible for the "programmatic" aspects. This would parallel the current IRTA program. Assurances should be made to ISB by the ICs that these documents are correct and complete, and that the program requirements have been met. This would enhance ISB's ability to process J-1 packages more quickly and accurately.

4.1.6 Policies regarding Missing Information or Late Packages

The focus group with the ISs revealed frustration that many visa packages (25% to 30%) are received incomplete from the ICs or contain conflicting information, e.g., missing a diploma, or different birth dates for the same person. In the past, packages missing significant information were returned to the ICs for correction. After IC complaints about this "lack of customer service," FIC directed that ISB should not send packages back but simply call or email the Key Contact, however there was no decrease in error rates or incomplete package rates. In fact, more time is spent by ISB calling/emailing the ICs Key Contacts about missing or conflicting information. Anecdotal information seems to indicate that waiting for missing information or clarification on conflicting information, often results in missing a requested start date. And, often, this is attributed to ISB, rather than the IC. ICs (and those within the ICs) are not held accountable for what is clearly their responsibility (to provide complete and accurate information). In many other organizations, incomplete packages are not accepted for processing; some organizations with electronic systems utilize forms which do not allow the request form and package to be sent (electronically) to the visa center without all required fields completed.

Likewise, many packages (25% to 75%) arrive at ISB from the ICs with less than the requested/required lead time. Lead times for the different visa types are as follows: J-1's: 90 to 120 days, H-1Bs and O-1s: four to six months. The percentages of packages arriving with insufficient lead times (based on the requested start date) varies by IC from about 25% to a high of 75%, according to ISB staff. NCI actually gathered data on its case submissions, documenting that for the past two to three years, about 70% of their cases have been submitted with less than the desired lead time. Lead times are disseminated to all Key Contacts from ISB, yet they are not adhered to as strict policy. See Volume II, Appendix 8 for an example of a document used by ISB to explain the need for lead times to the ICs.

Lead times for processing visas are based not only on actual processing time, but also on other external time requirements. For example, even with a simple J-1, the organization with the fastest actual processing time (10 to 20 minutes) requested a lead time of six weeks: two weeks "in office" and four weeks for "in country" processing (visitors own country processing, and U.S. consulate/embassy processing). For H-1Bs and O-1s, the majority of the "lead time" is not ISB processing and preparing the package, but rather time in other agencies, e.g., two to four weeks in DOL for wage certification approval, and several months at INS. Thus, for H-1Bs and O-1s, ISB lead times were found to be generally consistent with other organizations. However, focus group and other anecdotal information indicate that sponsors and foreign scientists often do not appreciate these "external" processing time requirements over which NIH and ISB have no control, and sometimes have misconceptions about the lead time of other organizations compared to NIH.

4.1.7 Legal Counsel on Immigration Matters

Many of the best practice governmental organizations and universities interviewed stated that their Office of General Counsel (OGC) is tasked to, and indeed regularly does, provide advice and legal counsel to their visa processing center. At least one university had an immigration attorney as part of their visa center staff. In addition, the private organizations interviewed mentioned that they retain the services of an immigration lawyer to answer difficult questions that arise with specific cases.

In contrast, it appears that NIH's visiting program does not enjoy strong and timely support from the NIH Office of the General Counsel. ISB indicated that they have occasionally requested an opinion from NIH OGC, but sometimes have not gotten a timely response. ISB team leaders also indicated that, if readily available, legal council could be of value on several complex questions each month. In addition, Senior Investigators (SI) indicated they thought the Visiting Program could benefit from competent, qualified legal counsel. SIs recommended that ISB make use of outside legal counsel for those cases that are beyond their abilities, and for obtaining information about new laws and regulations coming out of INS. They would like to see an ISB that is not reactive, but that anticipates changes in laws and regulations and can then disseminate information to the NIH community about how these changes will impact specific visa or visiting program categories

4.2 ISB Organization and Staffing

Under initiatives such as GPRA, increasing emphasis has been placed on streamlining governmental activities through improvements in efficiency and better allocations of functions and responsibilities. Certain functions are best performed by a single, cross-cutting office instead of within multiple organizational units.

4.2.1 Centralization and Location of the Visa Processing Function

Centralization refers to the retention of control over certain functions, actions or decisions at relatively high levels in an organization. Certain actions are best performed by a single, cross-cutting unit instead of as repetitive processes within multiple organizational units. Based on our best practice research DynCorp believes that visa processing is one such activity that should be centralized.

First, most best practice organizations interviewed centralized their visa processing activities. The exception is DOE, where security issues surrounding the DOE Foreign Visits and Assignments Program take precedence and make it necessary to process and approve visits and assignments – and visas – on site. Second, most best practice organizations collocate or organizationally align their policy making unit with the implementation or operations unit for visa processing.

At NIH, the responsibility for policy-making decisions related to the Visiting Program remains with OIR because these policies affect all of the ICs and they need coordination by one office. Responsibility for carrying out those policies on a day-to-day basis is a critical aspect of promoting the credibility and soundness of the Visiting Program. However, at NIH, ISB, as the implementation arm of the Visiting Program, is located in a Center (i.e., FIC). To maintain credibility for its actions, ISB needs the support of an office that understands its mission. To facilitate implementation of its policies, OIR should be able to deal directly with ISB and not have to go through the intermediary of Fogarty International Center. Because FICs focus is shifting towards international intramural research, and because ISB serves all of the ICs and not just FIC, a more appropriate placement of the unit would be within an organizational unit whose mission is to coordinate policies to all ICs, or, within an organization that provides key support services to ICs. ISB currently has very limited interactions with the rest of FIC, however it has almost daily interaction with OIR. The organizational placement of ISB in FIC assumes that the underlying commonality is "international;" however, from a functional standpoint, its commonality is with OIR, or, providing support services similar to ORS.

In contrast to other administrative functions, such as procurement, which have been largely decentralized to the ICs, as was recommended by a recent Arthur Anderson study, DynCorp does not recommend decentralizing visa processing. We agree with the Arthur Anderson study for those other administrative functions, for the reasons noted in that study, including decentralization of the Title 42 authority for the fellowship award program. However, many of the assumptions and conditions which make decentralizing these functions not only feasible but also enhance effectiveness, efficiency and service, do not apply to the visa processing function. Decentralization of the visa processing function would, in contrast, have the opposite impact. In addition, it is unlikely that Responsible Officer Authority for the J-1 program could be delegated to 20 or more Alternate Responsible Officers in the ICs. If decentralization were sought for the visa processing function, DynCorp believes this would jeopardize consistency in policy and standardization in products, and sacrifice expertise in visa rules and regulations. In the case of visas, noncompliance with regulations

could result in deportation of foreign scientists, a serious consequence. NIH would also loose the economy of scale; smaller ICs would not have the staff to dedicate to this function and would probably still have to look to an outside unit to process visiting scientist cases for them. In addition, the required visa record-keeping and reporting (to DOS and USIA) would become a new problem – how would NIH would compile and aggregate information from over 20 different ICs and 20 or more different data systems, and who would be tasked with this chore?

For these reasons, DynCorp takes the view that the visa processing function should remain centralized, and that ISB should be located in an organization which has a more similar mission and function.

4.2.2 Organizational Level

A review of the best practice organizations reveals that ISB is currently at a lower organizational level in FIC than other comparable organizations within agencies that handle large visa programs (e.g., DOE has an Office of Foreign Visits and Assignments). This may put NIH at a perceived disadvantage when the ISB Branch Chief meets with his/her counterparts or interacts with INS and DOS, including at the USIA Working Group.

4.2.3 Structure of ISB Teams

ISB is currently organized into three teams. Each team has a Team Leader. The Team Leaders function as supervisors of their teams, by providing advice and guidance on the processing of cases. The Team Leaders also serve as points of contact for the office for other visa areas such as the web site, the JVERC committee, tax information, or ECFMG.

The ISs within each Team are assigned to work on processing cases for various ICs. This type of assignment is "customer-centric." Usually, a customer-centric organization assumes that the customers are different, and therefore service teams must be differentiated to handle those customer differences. However, in the case of NIH, the ICs are not very different from one another. Rather, it is the visa types and NIH foreign scientist/visiting program types that are different. These dictate the type and level of service to be provided by the ISs. Other best practice organizations have team structures that reflect differences in either customers or products. For example, Duke University has three teams: one for the Medical Center, one for all other Departments (reflecting the differences between these two customer groups – and the difference between physicians and interaction with the ECFMG and other "standard" research scholar J-1s), and one processing extensions, monitoring work authorizations, and providing data support.

Currently IS staff turnover is one to two per year. New IS staff are brought in as GS-7s. They train with an experienced IS and learn all the functions, processes, visa types and NIH programs. Then, after about six months of training, they are assigned their own caseload of

one or more ICs, so that each IS is responsible for about 200 foreign scientists and the associated caseload, visa processing and foreign scientist program activities.

While each IS is assigned about 200 Foreign Scientists and one or more Institutes, it appears that, based on anecdotal information, limited desk audits, shadowing, and review of samples of backlog reports, one staff member may have a significant backlog (50 cases, all active) and another, a low backlog (20 cases, most not requiring immediate work). This situation, and who is overwhelmed and who is not, changes over time. Currently, Team Leaders try to reallocate work within the team if requested by a staff member or based on looking at backlog reports, and team leaders may even reallocate work between teams. This practice of reassigning workload and cases as needed, combined with reassignment of ICs as there are changes in the ISB staff (e.g., staff members leave, new staff are trained), often twice a year, in effect makes IC assignments meaningless.

4.2.4 Staffing

Just half of the IS staff, and the Team Leaders and Deputy Branch Chief, have been with ISB well over ten years. The other ISs have been with NIH for a much shorter period of time; the turnover of staff appears to occur mostly within these newer staff members, who, once they are trained and knowledgeable, are targets for recruitment by other agencies or even law firms. The Branch Chief retired at the end of December 2000. Recruiting for that position was put on hold pending the results of the study and a possible move of ISB within the organization (e.g., to OIR).

The bounds of the study precluded an in-depth analysis of grade levels and position classification. ISB ISs range from GS-7 to GS-11. In querying other organizations about the caseload and variety of duties and responsibilities of its staff, and approximate average grade level or salary, it became clear that while the average grade level (or salary) is similar between ISB ISs and those who process visas in other organizations, ISB staff have a broader range of duties and responsibilities, and deal with a more complex program, than their counterparts in other organizations. (See Volume II, Appendix 4.) This broader range of duties results in ISs spending less than 40% of their day (about 3 hours) on visa processing. Exhibit 5 shows how an IS spends a typical workday, based on shadowing several representative ISs for several days in December, 2000.

Exhibit 5. A Typical Workday of an Immigration Specialist

Activity	Range of Time Spent (in Hours)	Percentage of Eight Hour Workday
Processing Cases	1-3 hours	13 – 38%
Appointments	30 minutes – 1 hour	6 – 13%

Read/Answer Emails - related to a specific case - general questions	1-3 hours	13 – 38%
Filing/Looking for Supplies/Mail	30 minutes – 1 hour 20 minutes	6 – 16%
Phone calls	30 minutes – 1 hour	6 – 13%
Logs (Master File, Electronic Log, Backlog, FPS2)	30 minutes or less	6% or less
Talk to ISs/Team Leaders	30 minutes	6%
Prepare for appointments	Up to 20 minutes	4%
Fax/Reboot Computer	20 minutes	4%
Read immigration newsletters, articles	10 minutes	2%

As noted, ISs are assigned to support ICs and about 200 foreign scientists. Of three organizations that are most like NIH (the visa process is not automated, staff process J-1s and H-1Bs, and staff also do some other related work, such as orientations), visa centers are staffed with about one staff for 100 to 120 scholars (i.e., three staff – 350 scholars/visas processed; five staff – 500 scholars/visas processed). If we count all authorized positions in ISB (e.g., even the office manager), then ISB is staffed at almost this level (20 staff – 2500 to 3000 foreign scientists/visas processed; or one staff to 120 to 150 foreign scientists). However, this is not quite an accurate comparison, since the staffing numbers cited above were those that actually did visa processing and related functions (e.g., those numbers do not include a receptionist, office manager, or the center director). If we take out the receptionist, office manager, and the Branch Chief, and allow for the turnover in ISs, then ISB is staffed at about one staff to 150 to 200 foreign scientists – a significantly higher workload per IS than these other comparable organizations. This may contribute to the turnover of staff – good ISs have been recruited by other agencies and by law firms offering higher salaries and lower workloads. In contrast, with automation, staff can process more cases; in another organization, one staff member processes about 1000 J-1's, but has no other duties.

In general, the ISs are very conscientious and. knowledgeable. However, due to workload, DynCorp found them to be "stressed." ISs repeatedly stated that they were under a lot of stress. Part of this is due to the amount of work which they have on their plate. Backlogs of cases that each IS has to handle range from a low of about 20 to a high of 50-60 at any given time. Reorganization to product teams and automation may help reduce overall workloads and peak workloads, and thus reduce stress. Other factors contributing to IS stress include pressure from ICs to get foreign scientists on board as quickly as possible, pressure to process renewals and other priority actions so foreign scientists remain in compliance with regulations and have current, nonexpired visa status, and lack of control over many aspects of the entire visa process (e.g., processing time at INS), for which they are still held "responsible" by the ICs. Research on stress and stressful jobs has found that

the most stressful jobs are those where the employee has the least control over their work, their time, and their day. The level of stress is inversely proportional to the level of control. Stress can impact accuracy on form letters and other documents, and on interactions with customers. Stress also contributes to the turnover of staff.

Through on-the-job training and attendance at conferences, IS staff gain and maintain knowledge of visa regulations and NIH policy. However, soft skills such as oral and written communication could use improvement (e.g., speaking very rapidly to foreign visitors when explaining complex issues, writing which is not as clear and concise as possible).

4.2.5 Office Management and Support

Office management is an area which could use significant improvement. Considering the amount of complicated paperwork this office processes, DynCorp believes that the support staffing in ISB is inadequate.

ISs spend an inordinate amount of time looking for various forms, envelopes, and collating information packages. In fact , the ISs reported that supplies located in one location would often be restocked in a different location. Pre-arrival packages were previously available collated; now this material is now spread across various filing areas. One of the two copiers was out of service for some time.

ISB has been unable to fill its "receptionist" position with a full-time employee for over two years; the position has been filled by a series of temporary employees. Given the significant interaction required with visiting scientists and others, ISB is in need of permanent front office staff with professional demeanor (for many scientists, ISB is their first contact in NIH), and knowledge about NIH, ISB, ISB staff, and the Visiting Program. The office receives complicated phone calls from individuals with foreign names that are hard to spell, and who are sometimes difficult to understand. The turnover of temporary help requires the Branch to continually train a new person, and answer questions for them. ISs also are sometimes assigned to answer phones and greet visitors. This takes up valuable time that could be spent processing cases. In addition, it is sometimes difficult for a temporary worker to be as dedicated and conscientious as an employee would be.

The office also lost a half of an support staff FTE. Filing of cases has been impacted. Files are sometimes misplaced by a "temporary," resulting in many hours of lost staff time (e.g., active cases were recently located, after three hours of searching in the active case files and on individual's desks, in the terminated case files).

4.2.6 Office Space

In the focus group with ISs, office space was discussed at great length. ISs believe the old building they are in does not present a positive image for ISB or for NIH. ISB serves as the

first point of contact for the foreign scientist, and the current space creates an impression of nonprofessionalism, disorganization, and lack of importance of the foreign scientist program. While FIC stated that ISs seem to have liked their quarters several years ago, recent increases in staff and maintenance problems (e.g., dripping sewage) have changed their view.

General GSA guidelines specify about 100 – 125 square feet of office space (not including halls, etc.) per person, with additional space as required for large volumes of office files, or work functions that require meeting space with customers, etc. For supervisors, (e.g., branch chief), about 200 square feet per person is recommended by GSA. Many cubicles in the basement of Building 16A provide only about six feet by eight feet – or about one half the guideline amount. This is clearly insufficient. Files are spread throughout the three floors of building. In addition, there is almost no space for ISs to conduct orientations or other meetings with foreign scientists, or to hold branch meetings to discuss issues and new visa policies and regulations. ISs hold approximately two orientation sessions a week of about one hour each with Visiting Fellows/Scientists and their families, and numerous other types of meetings for the following reasons:

- Renewal
- Transfer
- Travel
- O-1 request
- ECFMG
- Permanent Residency request
- Change of Status
- H-1B request
- Replacement of the IAP
- Cancel a petition
- Meet with a Key Contact

It was estimated by ISB that in the year 2000, each IS conducted an average of 300 to 325 meetings or appointments, for a total of almost 4,000 per year for ISB. Review of an representative individual IS's 2000 appointment book confirmed this; this IS had 315 meetings/appointment in 2000.

4.3 Visa Processing and Automation

Processing of visa requests begins in the IC with the collection of information and completion of forms to ISB for visa form or petition completion. The process requires the collaboration a large number of people and organizations within NIH, as well as approvals and processing of visa by other agencies, such as DOL, DOS, and INS. The following sections provide details on types of visas used at NIH and specifics of visa processing within NIH.

4.3.1 Types of Visas Used at NIH

There are two categories of Visiting Program participants: (1) Trainees, who are in non-FTE positions, and are at NIH primarily for training, such as Visiting Fellows and Supplemental Fellows, who may receive a stipend, and unpaid (by NIH) guest researchers and Special Volunteers; and (2) NIH employees occupying FTE positions, generally paid under Title 42 appointments, such as Research Fellow, Clinical Fellow, Staff Scientist, Staff Clinician, and tenure-track Investigator (VP) and tenured Senior Investigator (VP). Tenure-track Investigators (VP and tenured Senior Investigators may be in the Visiting Program until permanent resident status is granted. Each participant works closely with a senior NIH investigator who serves as supervisor or sponsor during the period of award or appointment.

Visiting Program participants who are foreign nationals must have a visa that permits training or employment in the United States. Most of the foreign nationals in the program have one of the following nonimmigrant visas: J-1 (Exchange Visitor), F-1 (student – for post-completion practical training after award of doctoral degree), H-1B (nonimmigrant worker in a specialty occupation), O-1 (extraordinary ability in the sciences), and TN (professionals who are Canadian or Mexican entering the US under NAFTA). J-1 visa holders comprise 76% of the foreign nationals in the program, with an additional 12% being on H-1Bs and O-1s, 6% on TN, F-1 or B-1 and the remaining 6% on other types. (See Exhibit 2 in Section 3.0) Visiting Fellows are currently ineligible for H-1B or O-1 visas.

As noted previously, the visiting program as a whole has grown by about 10% over the past six years; the number of Visiting Fellows, who utilize primarily J-1 visas, has increased by about 25%. With the removal of the H-1B cap for NIH, the number of H–1B cases processed by ISB is expected to increase.

4.3.2 Visa Processing in the ICs

The Principal Investigator (PI), Lab Chief or Branch Chief first identifies a foreign scientist that they want to bring to NIH for a particular research project, considering the education and experience of the scientist, the nature of the research project, whether they have an FTE position available or not, funding, and the type of visa currently held by the applicant, if any. Next, they determine the appropriate NIH program category and visa type to offer. The visiting program participant is contacted to inform them of the requirements for the visa application, and the participant sends their qualifications, including a resume, letters of recommendation, certificates or degrees as required. A package is usually assembled by the lab or branch secretary and reviewed by the Key Contact. The package includes the Form 829-2, Request for Visiting Fellowship Award for a Visiting Fellow or Form 829-1, Request for Appointment to the NIH Visiting Program, or, other NIH Form as appropriate (e.g., Form 590 for Guest Researcher). The package is sent to the PI/Lab/Branch Chief for approval first, then to the Scientific Director for Intramural Research for his or her approval, and then, if it is for a J-1 or Fellowship, it is forwarded to ISB for processing. If the package is for an employee (FTE) position, usually an H-1B visa, the Scientific Director forwards an SF-52

to the Personnel office, and if there are no exceptions related to salary, it is forwarded to FIC. All exceptions must be approved by OIR. The IC also completes the wage certification for the H-1B package. For O-1 visa packages, the Scientific Director must send a justification memo for petitioning INS to the Director of OIR for approval, and the rest of the package is assembled by the PI/Lab Chief and Key Contact before it is sent to FIC.

While the basic steps and processes followed within the ICs are similar, there are some minor differences related to how a package is put together, who compiles the documents, and the approval chain. In some cases, the Director of the Institute or Center signs off on the package before it is sent to ISB, or it is sent through the ICs Administrative Officer (AO) and/or personnel center. On average, it takes about four weeks from the time the Lab/Principal Investigator or Scientific Director initiates the request to bring the foreign scientist on board (or extend his/her stay) until the package is complete and sent to FIC. See Volume II, Appendix 9 for a flow chart which depicts the visa process within the ICs.

4.3.3 Visa Processing in ISB

Once a package for a new Visiting Fellow or Visiting Scientist is at ISB, the data entry clerk enters case information into the ISB database, prepares a folder and gives it to an IS. The IS reviews the case for completeness and determines if the requested start date meets the requirements for lead time. If the start date is not realistic, or if there is any information missing, the IS will contact the Key Contact of the IC to obtain the missing information or to change the start date.

Once the IS has a complete package, case processing can begin. Case processing consists of five stages. Stage one, the IS begins to assemble the necessary INS, U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) or DOS forms. For a J-1, it is the IAP-66, with the level of patient contact (LPC) attachment and Family attachment (if applicable), and the Award/Appointment letter. For an H-1B visa, it is the preparation of the H-1B petition, the Appointment letter, and the instructions on how to obtain a wage determination (which is sent to the Key Contact). For an O-1 visa, it is the preparation of the O-1 petition and the meetings with the applicant, sponsor, key contact to discuss requirements for the O-1 petition and to review documentation. Stage Two is the sending of documents to outside agencies for approval, such as to DOL for the wage certification and to INS Vermont Service Center for the H-1B or O-1 petitions. Once all documents are returned from outside agencies, Stage Three is the sending of immigration forms to the ISB branch chief and/or OIR for review and signature, and the Award/Appointment letter to the FIC Director for approval and signature. Stage Four is the preparation of the pre-arrival packet, which includes personalized instructions and the mailing of the package to the scientist abroad no later than 30 days prior to the expected appointment date. This is to allow the scientist to obtain a passport and/or visa and to make travel arrangements. Stage Five is the appointment with the foreign scientist when he or she arrives in the U.S. At the appointment, the IS provides an after arrival packet (which again includes detailed instructions and relevant information), schedules the foreign scientist for a tax seminar, and prepares additional documents, such as a Fellowship

Activation notice, NIH Acceptance Notice, SF-52, Form NIH 829-6, Form 8233 (if the scientist if from a tax treaty country), Form 2542-1, Form I-9, and Notice of Action. At the appointment, the IS gives him/her an orientation explaining their visa status and responsibilities, including, for example, information on obtaining a Social Security number, and explains all of the forms. The scientist signs necessary forms as applicable. IC sponsors are also invited to these orientations. After the appointment, the IS distributes paperwork to the IC officials and keeps copies in the case folder. The foreign scientists also applies for a Social Security number (SSN); the card is mailed to ISB, where the IS records the SSN in the various databases and the foreign scientist's case folder, forwards a copy to the relevant IC, and then calls the foreign scientist to come pick up his/her card. This ensures that the SSN is recorded in the appropriate files.

See Volume II, Appendix 10 for copies of the various visa process flow charts (provided by NIH).

The processes and duties of the ISs in processing visas for each program participant category are laid out in an IS Handbook. This is provided to each new IS upon arrival at ISB, along with the NAFSA: Association of International Educators (NAFSA) handbook and pertinent regulations, e.g., 8 CFR. ISs must also become familiar with the NIH policies related to the Visiting Program, OIR's Personnel Policies, Delegations of Authority, FIC/ISB Technical Advisories and checklists for visa requests. With all of this information, it is particularly difficult to understand how the visa types and program categories interrelate. What is needed is a consolidation of all information related to visa processing in one place, either on the web or in a master manual so that everyone has the same information available and the numerous policies and procedures can be presented in a clearer and more concise format.

4.3.4 Visa Processing – Databases and Automation

ISB visa processing is characterized by the use of multiple databases, redundant data entry, and a general lack of automation. While ISB utilizes "shell" letters and forms, data must be reentered in each, and IAP-66's are typed on a typewriter. In addition, many of the ICs have their own databases to track foreign scientists and visa information.

A practice that has become increasingly important in the immigration field is the automation of the various forms and official documents used. Most of the best practice organizations use some form of automation or information technology to convert inputs to outputs (see Volume II, Appendices 4 and 5). Information technologies make work processes more efficient, giving organizations an opportunity to divert staff resources to areas of greater importance, such as training and advising, or to handle increasing case loads without adding additional staff. Use of IT and computerized data systems help alleviate gaps caused by reduced FTEs. Unintegrated data systems can increase duplication of effort, restrict lines of communication and bolster organizational boundaries or "turf" issues. While the development of immigration – based automation tools is still evolving, NIH has the ability

to successfully integrate technological innovations that are currently available into its visa processes.

Currently, ISB staff use several databases. The main database is the Electronic Log, which is written in COBOL. Since January of 1989, the Electronic Log has been used to track all approved requests for action received by FIC/ISB. Actions are entered into the Log within 24 hours of receipt by FIC/ISB. The Log can be used not only by ISB staff, but by all those throughout NIH with whom ISB interacts. It is ISB's policy that IC Key Contacts perform their own status checks using the Electronic Log.

Because of the growth in the Electronic Log, records of actions that are older than two years and one month are placed in an Archival (Electronic) Log, which is inaccessible to the ICs. The Electronic Log is linked to the Master File which provides personal information on each NIH Visiting Program participant. Both databases are linked through the use of a case number for each visiting program participant. Both the Electronic Log and the Master File have standard reports; however due to the age of the primary system, GPRA and performance-management type reporting and data analysis is virtually nonexistent or impossible. Thus, work load planning or projecting is not easily done. Data to support resource requests, resource allocation, or other management decision-making is difficult to obtain without many hours of labor.

In addition to these two main databases, ISB staff make use of separate tracking systems for the IAP-66 forms, and for tracking renewal dates. There is also a report, generated from the Electronic Log, used for each IS and Team Leader to keep track of the backlog of cases. Finally, some ISs keep their own individual logs of in-process H-1Bs, which lists major steps/milestones (e.g., Labor Certification Application (LCA) to IC, LCA to DOL, LCA received from DOL, case to INS), and enter dates as each step is done.

Currently, all forms move in paper. ISB uses about 125 to 175 different forms and letters, ranging from the IAP-66 which is a multicarbon form that is typed on a typewriter, to MS word shells, to forms in IMMFORMS. The only tool used that is electronic is the Fellowship Payment System2. Some ICs do use IMMFORMS to generate some electronic INS forms, like I-129, I-140, and I-539. However, none of these forms or shells is linked to the database; thus, information such as name, address, visa dates, and the like, is repeatedly typed into each form and letter shell needed for an individual action. In some cases, the same information may be typed 10 or more times for one action, such as a simple renewal – a renewal action uses 12 forms and shells, plus entries into the several data bases. Thus, the probability of making an error increases significantly.

Since the IAP-66 is still typed on a typewriter, if a typographical error is made, it must be corrected by hand by using four different colors of correction fluid (for each of the four color sheets of the multipart form), waiting until the fluid dries, reinserting the form into the typewriter, getting the form aligned for correction, and retyping. If more than three corrections are made, the form must be "cancelled," recorded in the log as voided, and a new form typed. An IAP-66 takes approximately 15 minutes to type, not counting correcting

errors. In the course of a Visiting Fellow's stay at NIH, an IS may type ten IAP-66's for him/her, not counting "re-do's." Unlike some Universities such as Duke, NIH was not part of the INS Coordinated Interagency Partnership Regulating International Students (CIPRIS) pilot, which automates transmittal of the IAP-66. While CIPRIS is now just starting to be implemented across the nation by INS, full implementation is scheduled to take five years, and, according to the INS CIPRIS office, NIH is not scheduled to come on-line for several years.

Thus, it is clear that ISB is currently entering and tracking duplicative sets of visiting program participant data and processing massive amounts of paper in the form of official forms, shell letters, and notices of action which all need official sign-offs. To minimize the possibility of error and to save processing time, ISB needs a single data system which will allow for the electronic processing of forms and letters. As a first step to obtaining a new database system, NIH needs to conduct a comprehensive requirements analysis, and ensure that all people who will use the system and system information participate (such as the ISB staff, Key Contacts, Personnel, etc.). Best practice would include following the methodology of the Carnegie Mellon Software Engineering Institute's Capability Maturity Model processes for requirements analysis. The new database and tracking system should be used by all ICs as well as FIC/ISB. In addition, it should automate the processes as much as possible to eliminate redundant entry of data onto multiple forms, and allow for electronic transfer/forwarding/tracking of files to the maximum extent possible (including scanning capability). The system should also provide one master tracking number for a Foreign Scientist/Visiting Fellow (e.g., the Foundation for Advanced Education in the Sciences (FAES) uses their own number in their health insurance system, so it is difficult to reconcile the FAES invoicing with the FPS system output). The system should also integrate with other NIH systems such as FPS2 to allow for transfer and sharing of data.

DynCorp also briefly reviewed other organization's systems to determine transferability to NIH (to provide an alternative to development of an NIH-specific system). Potential candidate systems included DOE's FACTS system which can be tailored to suit NIH's needs, Duke University's on-line system, and ACIP's J-1 visa system. Of these, the DOE system should be investigated further. The Access-based Duke University system presents scalability issues (i.e., Access is not suited to the number of users and case volume at NIH), as does the ACIP system, which is based on the now outdated FileMaker Pro system (Harvard, which also uses a similar system, is in the early stages of designing and then moving to an Oracle-based system because of the limitations of the FileMaker Pro system).

4.3.5 Orientations

Currently, ISs conduct individual orientation sessions for each new foreign scientist upon their arrival at NIH. The content of these orientation sessions are similar, even between the different program and visa types. It is estimated that between 500-600 orientations for new J-1s are conducted each year by the ISs, and about 100 orientations for other visa types. On average, these sessions last about an hour. Each requires some preparatory time and some

follow-up time, for a total of one and one-half to two hours of IS time for each orientation. That translates into an expenditure of 800 to 1400 hours a year of IS time for orientations.

In contrast, most other organizations either conduct group orientations, or, orientations are the responsibility of the sponsor and the sponsoring organization, rather than the visa processing unit.

If NIH conducted two group orientations a week, with the exceptional individual orientation if absolutely needed, it is estimated that approximately 500 to 1000 hours could be saved (approximately one-third to one-half an FTE).

4.4 Communications

Communication within an organization is often used to describe how units talk with one another. Improvements in communication between ISB and the ICs will have a far-reaching effect on the clarity and efficiency of the visa process. The following sections cover findings related to general communications, such as managing customer expectations and customer service skills, and also, reflecting the direction of Executive Steering Committee, a large section on the NIH Visiting Program web sites.

4.4.1 Marketing of ISB

During the interview process and in the focus groups, it became apparent that in general, sponsors and even some of the foreign scientists in the ICs hold a negative image/perception of ISB. Much of the negative image of ISB is caused by a lack of information about its mission, services, and processing priorities. While there is much information on the NIH web site concerning the rest of the Fogarty International Center and its strategic goals, there is none on the ISB. There is only information on the Visiting Program itself, which still leaves open the question for many at NIH of exactly what the staff at ISB do. Anecdotal evidence indicates some people still think of ISs as primarily "clerical" staff. This lack of understanding about the workload of the ISs and what services ISB provides contributes to a negative image for the branch and its staff. In addition, anecdotal evidence indicates that many at NIH have misperceptions about the lead times and services of ISB compared to other organizations (i.e., they think other organizations are much better, when this is not necessarily the case).

The focus group sessions revealed that the Senior Investigators experience more frustration in dealing with ISB than any of the other groups interviewed, such as the Tenure Track group, the Visiting Fellows or the Staff Scientists. Most of the senior investigators believe that the lead times given by ISB are a major detriment to their hiring of qualified scientists. Yet, this group had little knowledge that the current workloads of the ISs have created the need for lead times of three to four months for J-1s. In addition, this group was not aware that many delays caused in the processing of visa applications are due to the schedules

imposed on NIH by outside reviewing agencies (such as DOS or INS) and/or the incompleteness of the information submitted to ISB from the ICs themselves. Finally, the senior investigators admitted difficulty in discerning what rules are imposed by NIH and what rules are imposed from outside agencies.

It is also clear that the value of ISB to NIH has not been documented nor publicized, and thus is not appreciated. For example, it would cost NIH significantly more to out source services ISB now provides, and many of the services associated with visa processing and the NIH Visiting Program could not be outsourced. Based on our comparative research, which included organizations which provide visa processing services under contract, organizations that do out source some aspects of their visa processing, and inquiries to law firms, DynCorp estimates a cost of $2.1 million a year for contracting out just case processing and orientations (current volume), compared to the total ISB annual budget of $1.2 million a year. NIH also has not conducted a results chain analysis, nor assessed the value and contribution of this particular administrative support function to its intramural research mission. A simple value analysis is presented in Section 4.5, Performance Measurement, indicating that the foreign scientist program supports about one-fifth of the intramural research conducted at NIH, or about $105 million to $454 million of Intramural Research (depending on how the non-FTE research contribution is considered). From this perspective, the return on investment for the ISB budget would be in the range between 88 to 1 to 378 to 1. A more detailed and accurate analysis should be conducted, and the results of this analysis should be included in the marketing materials.

4.4.2 Managing and Meeting Customer Expectations: Service Level Agreements and Partnering Initiatives

ISB supports and serves all of NIH by providing visa processing services. Currently, ISB relies primarily on the various procedures documents, and verbal communications, to convey information to its customers in the ICs about the services ISB provides, and the "terms and conditions" of those services (e.g., the processing time required for different visas). Procedure documents also include instructions about completing forms. Information is also provided on the ISB webpage. These documents, then, in some ways, serve to lay out what customers in the ICs can expect. However, as noted, many of ISB's customers have unrealistic expectations or expectations which do not match the published service levels (e.g., for visa processing times). The challenge, then, for ISB, is how to better manage its customers' expectations (as well as, of course, to provide good customer service).

In addition, the relationships between ISB and the ICs varies from good working relationships to almost adversarial in a few cases. Some ICs seem to blame ISB for problems in visa processing, while ISB's view would be that the IC is the cause of the problem. This seems to vary more by IC, rather than by IS (e.g., one IS may have a good working relationship with one IC, but have problems with another). In these cases, the challenge is to move from an adversarial relationship to working together to make visa processing as smooth as possible.

DynCorp is familiar with two mechanisms which have been used successfully by other organizations to resolve similar challenges: Service Level Agreements and Partnering Initiatives. These mechanisms should be reviewed by ISB for application to visa processing services.

Service Level Agreements have been mostly associated with in-house computing services or facility management, however their applicability is much wider. Service Level Agreements are generally applicable in situations where services are provided by a centralized unit, the service is viewed as a corporate necessity, and where there are specific levels of service which can be described (e.g., visa processing time). If specific user requirements have never been specified, in terms of service needed or quality expected, a mismatch of expectations between the end user and the service provider results. Service Level Agreements are one way of aligning the service that is able to be provided for the cost or resources allocated with the needs of the customers.

The component elements of a Service Level Agreement include a clear description of the responsibilities of ***both*** the service provider and the customer, the level of service which will be provided by the service provider (usually in measurable terms), customer service standards as appropriate, and problem resolution procedures. Service Level Agreements thus make clear what the customer can expect, and, by clarifying customer responsibilities, also clarify that the promised service can only be delivered if the customer meets their responsibilities.

Partnering Initiatives have been used successfully by the US Army Corps of Engineers for years to reduce the adversarial relationship that has traditionally existed with construction projects between the contractors and the "owner" (i.e., the government organization contracting for the construction work). These initiatives also reduced the number of lawsuits and projects which were not completed within budget or on time. Partnering initiatives utilize a process where both parties develop mutual goals and also explore barriers and problems, from each parties' perspective, which impact accomplishment of the desired outcome or otherwise present problems. The Partnering process could be a very effective tool at NIH to use when certain ICs continue to transmit late packages or incomplete packages to ISB and an adversarial relationship develops.

4.4.3 Contacting ISs by Phone

Another polarizing issue for all groups interviewed is the difficulty in contacting the Immigration Specialists directly to ask general questions about visa requirements. There were varying opinions as to whether or not one had to contact ISB staff through the Key Contact or not. It appears that different ISs have different policies related to phone calls and this has created confusion and resentment within the NIH community. The problem from the perspective of the IS is that phone calls interrupt visa processing. Sampling data indicates that ISs currently spend about one-half to one 1 hour per day on phone calls; when an IS takes a call and interrupts visa processing, it often takes five minutes to get back into

the case and resume processing. Thus, many ISs have the "policy" that they do not take phone calls unless it is someone returning their call, or it is about a case they have in progress. The receptionist takes a message and the IS returns calls when they have completed a processing action.

4.4.4 Customer Service Skills

A number of customers of ISB, including Key Contacts, foreign scientists and senior investigators reported that ISB staff had poor customer service skills. For example, they reported that ISs were very abrupt, or nonresponsive, or not courteous. This was in fact confirmed by several of the ISs themselves, when several ISB staff stated: "I don't have time to be nice." In contrast, other ISs stated they enjoyed dealing with people and answering tough questions that needed to be researched.

Visa issues coupled with NIH foreign scientist programs makes for a very complex area. There are a large number of variables which must be considered when answering a question. Answering questions in a manner which can be understood by the "lay person" (i.e., sponsor/senior investigator, Key Contact or secretary, or foreign scientist) is a challenging task. In some cases, DynCorp observed that the ISs speak very rapidly to the foreign scientist which could make comprehension difficult. ISs usually provide a large amount of information in response to a question, or during the course of a meeting with a foreign scientist – covering all aspects of an issue. Again, this can be overwhelming and even confusing. When answering emails, some ISs can be "brusque;" and, in addition, some ISs can write more clearly than others. For ISs whose strong suit is not writing, answering an email can take several times longer and be less clear than for an IS with stronger writing skills. Some ISs maintain their own "library" of email responses which they reuse when asked similar general questions.

4.4.5 Ecomms, technical advisories, meetings, training

It appears that there are two primary methods used for communications from ISB to the ICs about changes in visa processing. Ecomms are send by email, and are used by the ISB Branch Chief to disseminate to the Key Contacts time-sensitive information that is critical to visa processing. This includes changes in NIH policies, changes in visa regulations, changes in processing times (e.g., for wage certifications by DOL or H-1Bs at INS,) etc. In addition, technical advisories are posted on the FIC web site to provide general information to the NIH community regarding visa policies and procedures and visa policy and procedure changes.

There are limitations to both methods. For example, although the technical advisories discuss the rules for each of the visa types, there is little information concerning how each visa package should be handled in the ICs at the early stages, or later at ISB. The technical advisories, like most of the procedural and policy documents written by ISB, tend to be

written in very "technical" language, i.e., assuming a level of knowledge equivalent to an immigration specialist or immigration lawyer, rather than from the perspective of the IC staff. Further, not all of the technical advisories are posted on the web site, a number are out-of-date and being rewritten, and there are no technical advisories for some topics, e.g., the F-1 visa.

The information included in the technical advisories needs to be coordinated with the information provided in the Ecomms. One Key Contact noted that the change to the H-1B policy was posted on the OIR web site but was not disseminated to the Key Contacts as an Ecomms. Key Contacts that did not regularly look at the OIR web site were therefore unaware of the change. Since neither the FIC or the OIR web site have a "new announcements" section, and information is fairly static on both sites, it is therefore not surprising that Key Contacts do not regularly check for new information, but rely on the Ecomms mechanism. Consequently, many of the foreign scientists (who tend to keep up with immigration and visa issues because of the personal impact) knew about the change in policy before the Key Contacts. ISB must continue to use the ecomms to communicate changes in policy directly to the Key Contacts.

Training of the Key Contacts and the lab and branch secretaries who prepare the visa request packages is critical. However, because of its workload, ISB has been unable to provide training. NCI's primary Key Contact has therefore been developing an NCI training program for the other NCI alternate Key Contacts and secretaries. NCI noted that when ISB had provided a training session, the feedback was that it was not taught at the right level; i.e., it was taught at the IS level, rather than at a "lay person" level, and the reasons for various requirements were not explained.

A number of the foreign scientists in the focus groups expressed a desire to have more information about visas and the NIH programs, and related information, provided to them. A number mentioned adding Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to the ISB webpage. They also noted that some of the information presented on the web site seemed to be in "lawyer language" and was hard to understand. Again, the content of the presentation must be targeted to the audience in terms of their knowledge and need for the particular information.

4.4.6 The FIC/ISB Web Site

In general, an effective web site permits its varied customers access to the same information at any time. Technology also allows varied levels of restricted access to different customers, depending on their individual needs. Presenting information that is currently on paper or that lies within the intellectual property of immigration advisors as content on a web site also makes it easy to update that information as it changes. This ensures customer access to the most up-to-date information.

Currently, information about the NIH Visiting Program and visa requirements is found on two separate webpages – FICs and OIR's. The two pages are neither linked nor cross-

referenced, and have very different addresses. This means that unless an individual knows where to look, posted information may not be found easily.

FICs current web site (http://www.nih.gov/fic/services/visiting.html) contains information about the NIH Visiting Program for Foreign Scientists. It includes a "Program Description" page, and another page, "Administrative Information for NIH staff." The Program Description provides very general information about the NIH Visiting Program and requires continual scrolling to read. The Administrative Information page contains a topic list (16 topics) but only four of them are "active" with accessible information; specifically, Technical Advisories, O-1 Visa Criteria, ECFMG-sponsored Alien Physician information, and Visa Types commonly used at NIH (a simple table showing visa class, purpose, and employment authorization). The visa table contains no visa information nor cross-references to the various NIH Visiting Program categories. The other topic titles are not "active" (i.e., clicking on them does not link to another page with information about that topic). There are no links to other sites, such as to INS for tax information for foreign scientists. One of the ISB Team Leaders is responsible for posting information to the FIC webpage. Compared to other international program web sites, the FIC web site provides very limited information and is not "user friendly." The FIC page contains a restricted link which allows Key Contacts and other NIH staff to access the ISB Electronic Log database to obtain information of the status of Visa requests.

Other information on the NIH Visiting Program can be found at OIR's Visiting Program webpage (http://www1.od.nih.gov/oir/sourcebook/personnel-appt/visit-prgm.htm, and http://www1.od.nih.gov/oir/sourcebook/irp-policy/visa-permres-toc.htm). Maintained by the Office of Intramural Research, this webpage provides additional information, and different information from the FIC webpage, about the Visa Requirements for the Visiting Program, including: J-1 Visas, J-1 Visa extensions, the JVERC, guidance for J-1 (Research Scholar) Visa Extensions Beyond Three Years, the revised NIH Policy on Use of H-1B Visas, O-1 Visa Petition, other visa, and No Objection Status (NOS) waivers. The information about J-1 and other visas is a presented in tabular format. The tables provide very little information about the visa requirements; the table indicates the NIH visiting program category the visa applies to (e.g., VF), home residency requirements, IGA waiver information, NOS waiver information, and the time period the visa can be issued for (duration). This also contains a restricted link to the NIH Manual, Chapter 2300-230-3, The NIH Visiting Program (Issuing Office: FIC 496-6166 Release Date: 6/1/87).

NIH Forms, including some of the Forms for the Visiting program (e.g., the form for J-1 visa extension review by the JVERC) are found on yet another web site, maintained by CIT (http://forms.cit.nih.gov/PersonnelPDF.html). Again, there are no references or links from either the FIC page or the OIR page to the CIT forms page.

In addition, a number of ICs web sites refer to the NIH Visiting Program; most of these link back the FIC Visiting Program page.

To identify the changes and additions that FIC ISB should make to the web site, DynCorp staff reviewed the web sites of over 20 universities' visa processing offices. About half of these were selected for more detailed review and comparison to the NIH Visiting Program sites, including the University of California at Berkeley, University of Michigan, University of Texas, Duke University, Georgetown University, Harvard University, Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, Johns Hopkins University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University and Tulane University. The full evaluations can be found in Volume II, Appendix 7. Other web sites of government organization and private sector organizations which pertained to visas and foreign visitor programs were also reviewed to identify possible links to add to the NIH ISB web site (e.g., IRS for tax information). Examples of good webpages, including both content and format, are contained in Volume II, Appendix 6, for NIH consideration.

Specific to FIC ISB, there would be a number of advantages to providing an enhanced web site, which would include having a "single source" web site which contains links to other internal and external sources of information on the NIH Visiting Program and Visiting Program Visas and visa processing. First, since many of the current web site users are foreign, the presentation of information on the web site, as opposed to communicating primarily via verbal communication, allows foreign scientists with limited English skills time to digest information and a greater probability that they will understand, retain, and utilize the information. This could pre-empt many questions that visitors have for immigration specialists, thus reducing interruptions and allowing more time to focus on visa processing. Second, as there are many updates and changes to immigration policies, both by U.S. immigration agencies and foreign governments, a web site that allows access to these and other relevant agencies' web sites promotes up-to-date knowledge about immigration regulations for the NIH community as a whole. Third, given the vast amount and varied type of information that a foreign visitor needs to successfully plan and execute a move to the United States, a web site that can successfully convey the information they need to do this is crucial. As the purpose of NIH's Exchange Visitor program is to enhance and promote international understanding and cooperation, it makes sense to make the foreign scientist's transition to and tenure at NIH a pleasant one, by providing readily and easily available and timely appropriate information. Having information available on demand could also reduce misunderstanding, miscommunication, or misinformation.

In addition to the general findings already noted, more specific findings and best practices are presented below, covering 5 areas: organization of information; immigration/visa information, pre-arrival/arrival/orientation information, links to other sites, and announcements, "news" and contact information.

4.4.6.1 Organization of Web Page and Information; "Table of Contents"

As noted, information on the NIH Visiting Program and Visas is currently found on at least two separate web pages. These pages contain very limited information, especially when compared to the information presented by university International

Center webpages. Locating information is difficult because of limited search capabilities. Indexing is also limited, and in the case of the FIC webpage, only 25% of the topics listed are "active" with information.

Best practice organizations have very good "Table of Contents" web site indexes, with all topics "active." They are usually organized with main and sub topics. Information is usually segregated and targeted for the foreign visitor and for the sponsor or Hosting Department. Examples of main topics include: information on visas, tax information, health insurance information, orientation/pre-arrival/arrival or "life in the US" information, forms, events and announcements, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and links to other sources of information.

4.4.6.2 Immigration/Visa Information

Currently, the FIC and OIR web pages provide minimal visa and immigration-related information beyond a general list of visa types that NIH visiting scholars may hold, and specific criteria for obtaining an O-1 visa.

Best practice organizations present detailed yet clear visa information for the visiting scholar and for the sponsor/host department. Two formats are used: tables and text libraries. Tables generally describe in detail each visa type using the following descriptors: definition, eligibility tests and requirements, any limitations (i.e., caps), alternatives to a particular visa type, professional titles associated with a visa type (visiting scholar, research scholar, etc.), type of compensation allowed (salary, stipend), initial duration of status allowed, number and duration of extensions allowed, necessary documents, process information such as procedures and estimates of processing times (short and long time frames), home country restrictions, and dependent information. The virtual immigration library that contains information sheets on each type of visa and their associated functions, such as work authorizations, etc., and policy and procedures manuals and documents.

In addition, almost all organizations have a frequently asked questions (FAQs) section to answer general questions. NIH could easily use some of the FAQs almost verbatim (see Volume II, Appendix 6 for examples).

4.4.6.3 Links to Other Sites

Neither the FIC nor the OIR web pages make use of links to either internal reference sources; i.e., there is no link from the FIC page to the OIR page or the CIT page, or from the OIR page to the FIC page or the CIT page, or to external sources of relevant information.

Best practice organizations all make use of links. This is particularly helpful to provide up-to-date information on subjects such as taxes; the cognizant agency (e.g., IRS for tax information) keeps the information current, and there is no need for the university to re-enter or reformat text and worry about keeping the information current.

Examples of links and lists of links used by other organizations are found in Volume II, Appendix 6. Specific links most used include:

(1) IRS (http://www.irs.gov/forms_pubs/pubs/index.htm), for the following publications:

Publication 513: Tax Information for Visitors to the United States
Publication 514: Foreign Tax Credit for Individuals
Publication 515: Withholding of Tax on Nonresident Aliens and Foreign Corporations
Publication 519: U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens

(2) Department of State and USIA (http://travel.state.gov/ and http://exchanges.state.gov/) for information on the various visa and visa regulations.

(3) Foreign Born (http://foreignborn.com): This site contains useful information about life in the U.S., providing information about such topics as banking, credit cards, drivers licenses, etc., as well as general visa information.

4.4.6.4 Orientation and Pre-Arrival/Arrival Information

Currently, there is no orientation or pre-arrival information on the FIC or OIR web site. Pre-arrival packages are sent to the foreign scientist and upon arrival, each new visiting scientist reports to an immigration specialist for an in-person, individual orientation session that lasts approximately one hour. During this orientation session, a variety of topics are covered such as visa information related to the individual, tax requirements, insurance requirements, and other miscellaneous topics, and some additional information, such as IRS tax booklets, may be given to the scientist at that time.

Best practice organizations place pre-arrival and arrival/orientation information on the web, and some also provide a CD-ROM to the foreign visitor. Some do not send any hard copies, but rather refer the visitor to the web site or CD. The type of pre-arrival/arrival/orientation information covered includes: social security card information, tax information and requirements, housing, insurance requirements, banking, transportation, local facilities and services, and community and cultural resources. Some organizations provide a checklist of visa procedures related to

travel, i.e., a list of what the scientist has to do while still in the home country to make sure all documents that are his responsibility are processed and all the pieces in place for him to legally enter the U.S. Links are provided for tax information and publications located on the IRS web site, and to the DOS web site which includes links to consulates and embassies.

Schedules for group orientation sessions and tax seminars are also available on-line.

4.4.6.5 Announcements and "News"; Contact Information

ISB generally sends out Ecomms to Key Contacts to update them on changes in visa processing. However, a recent change in the H-1B policy was simply posted by OIR on its webpage. A number of Key Contacts were unaware of the change because they did not access the OIR page, and had not received any other notice of the change. There is no "News" section on either the FIC or OIR web pages to alert readers to new information.

Best practice organization have a "News or Announcements" section, which "flashes" to alert the viewer that new information has been posted. Information is posted where it will reside permanently on the page, but linked to the "News" announcement section for some period of time, such as a month.

The FIC web page shows B. Daly as the webmaster; however, the Public Affairs Office in FIC is listed as the contact point and the phone number listed is the Public Affairs Office number. The OIR page does not show a point of contact.

Best practice organizations provide a contact point within the international center; the preferred practice is the use of a central email address and a central phone line rather than the publication of individual email addresses and phone numbers of immigrations specialists on the web site.

4.5 Performance Measurement

Setting performance goals and holding operational units accountable for their achievements are the effective management tools in both business and government. DynCorp found that most organizations have the database capability for generating performance management-type data for work planning and resource management, as well as for program reporting. Best practice organizations use this information for management decision-making, including resource allocation, planning, and identifying opportunities for improvements. Measurement data also documents improvements in performance and allows an organization to compare itself to similar organizations.

Because its systems are about 30 years old, NIH's data systems are not capable of generating "modern" performance management measures and statistics, e.g., GPRA-type measures. The

standard reports are either snapshots for a given day or yearly totals of each visa type or each NIH Visiting Program category (e.g., visiting fellow, exchange scientist), reflecting information needs of 30 years ago. ISB uses the MasterFile and Electronic Log to generate a number of weekly, biweekly, and monthly reports. However, due to the age of these systems, they have limited reporting capabilities. In addition, ISB has developed several small systems to augment the Master Electronic Log; these also have limited reporting capabilities.

Examples of the type of data needed by ISB to determine the effectiveness of services as well as to identify where problems exist so that work processes can be improved in the future follow:

- numbers of each new visa type and renewals that are processed by staff each year,
- the amount of time (in hours) it takes to process each type of visa,
- the amount of time taken by each step in a visa process,
- the numbers of packages that are received with errors or insufficient lead time,
- the numbers of J-1 visa holders who are renewed a third year, a fourth year or a fifth year,
- the number of J-1 visa holders who go home to fulfill the two year residency requirement,
- the number of J-1 visa holders who were converted to an H-1B or to an O-1 visa,
- a crosswalk between NIH visiting program participant categories and visa types,
- a crosswalk between countries represented at NIH and visa types,
- numbers of travel appointments, orientations, etc held a month,
- time expended in terms of preparatory time and appointment time for each type of appointment,
- in-process tracking of visa requests, (e.g., how many visa applications are at INS, how long they have been there), and
- numbers of visas processed by month (to look at cycles and peaks and valleys of work).

It must be emphasized that when compared to outside organizations such as private contractors or private immigration lawyers, ISB's services are cost-effective for the volume of visas processed. However, information related to workload will help in the future to identify how to assign staff resources and anticipate problems so that continuous improvement can be achieved. Such information can also be used to plan for resource needs when new program requirements are added.

In addition, GPRA requires government organizations to develop measures to document performance. Measures mentioned include not only input and output-type measures (e.g., traditional budget dollar and FTE authorization data, and how many of each product or service unit delivered), but also outcome or results measures, and efficiency measures. While they are required at the agency level, these can be applied to agency programs, including support services, to provide data to "roll-up" into agency performance reporting. In addition, on January 3, 2001, the following rule change was adopted by the Rules Committee, U.S. House of Representatives:

> "Performance Goals and Objectives. The requirement that committee reports include a summary of oversight findings and recommendations by the Committee on Government Reform, if timely submitted, is repealed and replaced with a new requirement that committee reports include a statement of general performance goals and objectives,

including outcome-related goals and objectives, for which the measure authorizes funding. [Rule XIII, clause 3 c, rule X, clause 4 c (2)]"

This means that every piece of legislation coming out of the House will have to have a performance measure associated with it – and, subsequently, the ability to measure and report back on performance results achieved.

4.5.1 ISB Support of NIH Intramural Research

Foreign scientists make a significant contribution to intramural research at NIH. FY2000 budget data for NIH shows there are about 6,800 Intramural Research FTEs. In addition, there are approximately 1,900 FTE's in the Clinical Center. ISB data shows about 500 to 800 of these FTE positions are filled by foreign scientists; most of these support intramural research.

In addition, there are about 3,000 to 3,400 Fellows at NIH in non-FTE, post-doctoral research and training positions. Most of these also contribute to intramural research. Of these, about 1,700 are foreign scientists in the Visiting Fellows program.

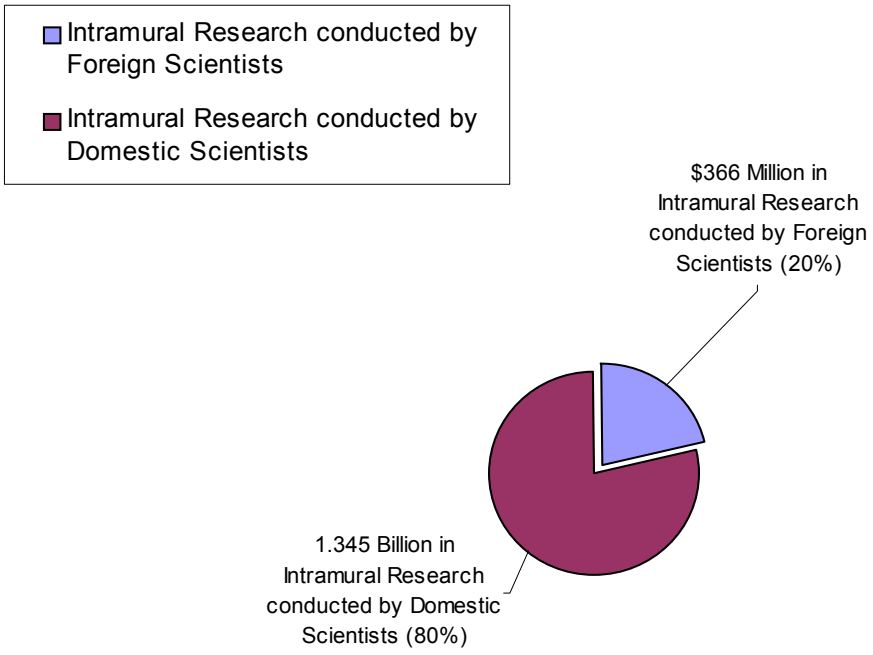
Thus, of about 10,000 persons supporting or conducting intramural research at NIH, about 2,400 are foreign scientists.

Thus, a conservative estimate might be that foreign scientists support about 20% of the intramural research conducted at NIH.

Because ISB plays a critical integral role in bringing these foreign scientists to NIH to accomplish this research, NIH's investment of $1.2 million (for ISB) supports almost $366 million of intramural research by ensuring foreign scientists are able to work at NIH (see Exhibit 6).

EXHIBIT 6
VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES BRANCH TO NIH INTRAMURAL RESEARCH

$1.745 Billion in Intramural Research



ISB provides direct support to approximately 2400 foreign scientists at NIH, including processing the visas and visa renewals which allow the foreign scientists to come to NIH to do research. Depending on the assumption used regarding support of Intramural Research by foreign scientists, estimates of Intramural research supported by foreign scientists range from 6% to 26%. The lower figure assumes only FTE's support Intramural Research, and that other non-employee foreign scientist research is for training and other purposes not directly related to supporting NIH research. If the assumption is made that all foreign scientist's research, (both FTE and non-FTE) does support NIH intramural research, then about one-fifth to one-fourth of the Intramural research at NIH is in some way supported by foreign scientists. It can thus be further estimated that each ISB FTE supports 120 foreign scientists (based on 20 FTE total in ISB; each of the 12 to 14 ISs in ISB are assigned 170 to 200 foreign scientists). On a dollar basis, ISB supports between $105 million and $454 million of Intramural Research. From this perspective, the return on investment for the ISB budget would be in the range between 88 to 1 to 378 to 1.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

DynCorp's objective throughout this study was to determine what works well in the current visa process at NIH while identifying areas that could be improved to ensure that each step in the visa process adds value. To this end, we believe the following recommendations capture the essence of streamlining and process improvement initiatives and incorporate GPRA principles that are inherent in an effective visa process.

Recommendations related to ISB are organized by the following areas: (1) NIH policies, (2) ISB organization and staffing, (3) visa processing and automation (4) communications, and (5) performance measurement.

5.1 NIH Policies

Analysis of interview results and written policy documents revealed the need to clarify, better organize and widely circulate written NIH policies, particularly among senior investigators, and that accountability for steps in the visa process should be better assigned. Eleven recommendations are discussed below for improving existing NIH policies on visa processing.

1. Make all written policy documents related to the NIH Visiting Program and visa regulations and processing available on the web, thereby making them accessible to all parties in the ICs. Ensure that policies can be understood by the intended audiences, and are kept updated.

Many of the best practice organizations indicated that it is easier to put all policy information on-line rather than attempt to develop a single paper policy and procedures handbook, because written handbooks are not easily shared within offices, and take much more effort to keep updated (i.e., printing and distribution). The biggest challenge for making this recommendation work is to keep the information up-to-date on the web site and to assign one person within FIC/ISB that is responsible for ensuring all relevant information is posted and up-to-date. If information is maintained on two or more pages (e.g., FIC, OIR and CIT), ensure there are links and cross-references, so all pertinent information is easily located.

2. Policy documents should be updated so they are current. Information should be consolidated into the fewest possible number of documents, and cross-referenced, so it is easy to find all the relevant information about a specific issue.

If possible, consolidate and integrate the current multiple sources of information on processes, procedures, and programs and visas into one SOP that includes all relevant information related to each action/process/program or visa type.

3. Issue three year initial J-1's unless a Senior Investigator/IC specifically requests a one or two-year J-1. Per 42 CFR 61.13, fellowships awards would remain two year award appointments.

NIH has the authority to issue three year J-1 visas, per 22 CFR 514, and should do so. Reducing the number of J-1 3rd year extensions/renewals would save a significant number of IS man-hours (200 to 500 plus associated renewal meetings). For those instances where a Senior Investigator knows that a specific research project is a one or 2 year project, or that a specific visiting fellow will only be at NIH for one or 2 years, the SI and IC should have the option of requesting a one or two year J-1 visa, rather than the "standard" three year J-1. Keeping the Fellowship awards at two years (per Title 42, Part 61) would provide a means for discontinuing "unproductive" research and fellows. Fellowships could be extended under the Title 42 delegation of authority, by the IC, with notification to ISB for file updating. If a fellowship was not extended for a third year, the IC would notify ISB and the visa could be terminated. If data (rather than anecdotal estimates) indicate that almost all fellows (e.g., over 95%) are extended for a 3rd year, NIH may want to approach DHHS to revise the Title 42 61.13 regulations to allow for three year fellowship appointments.

4. Submit a request to DOS for authorization for NIH to issue 4th and 5th J-1 renewals per Section 514.20.

Concerns were expressed in the focus groups about the time involved in pursuing a 4th and 5th year renewal through the JVERC Committee and then through DOS. Since USAID has received authority for five year J-1s from DOS per Section 514.20, NIH should also pursue obtaining similar authority, and concurrently simplifying the JVERC process.

5. Award/appointment letter should be signed by the ISB Branch Chief, or, an appointment letter signed by the IC and a separate letter relating to visa issuance, and accompanying the pre-arrival package, from ISB.

ISs expressed frustration that one to three days of processing time are lost due to the time it takes to obtain a signed appointment letter from the Director of FIC. DynCorp recommends that this letter be signed by the Branch Chief in ISB. If needed, a letter from the IC regarding the two year fellowship appointment, paralleling the IRTA appointment letter, could be utilized. This should shorten processing time by two to three days.

6. Shift the responsibility for entry and accuracy of the information on forms to the information "owner." Change the Form 829 to a two-part form. Part 1 should be completed by the IC with the "program information." Part 2 should be completed by the foreign scientist with the "personal" information.

Best practice research revealed that eliminating duplicative data entry, particularly for foreign names, addresses, and degrees that are hard to spell, not only reduces the number of errors made, but helps to produce documents faster. All forms should be made available on-line to either: (1) download and complete and return via email, (2) down-load, complete, print and return hard copy, or, (3) provide for direct form completion on-line via a fully electronic system.

7. The IC should review resume, diploma, reference letters, etc. for compliance with NIH fellows requirements. Information on diploma, date, etc, is provided to ISB on the 829, and no 829/request should be sent to ISB until it is complete (all required information filled in).

A cover memo from IC to ISB should document that the required documentation has been reviewed by the IC. This should be a form memo "shell" provided to the ICs by ISB for IC use.

This recommendation eliminates unnecessary duplication of effort by making the IC responsible for review of diplomas and reference letters, rather than review by both the IC and ISB. Unnecessary steps in the process cause delays in the processing of visa packages. This also parallels the IRTA process, and places the "programmatic" responsibility with the IC, where it belongs, in accordance with the delegations of Title 42 authorities.

8. When visa request packages are received incomplete, and when requested information is not forthcoming, advise the IC the request will be placed in an "inactive status" until the needed information is provided. After a reasonable period of time, if missing information is not provided, send incomplete packages back to the ICs.

One of the causes of processing delays has been incomplete information provided by the ICs. Once the package leaves the IC, the "burden" for processing, and the associated time, is then seen as ISB's responsibility, even though the package is incomplete. ISB may make repeated requests and not receive the needed information for several weeks. In most cases, the IS should email the ICs Key Contact to inform him or her of what is missing, and establish a deadline for receipt of that documentation. If the supporting documentation is incomplete or is not received in a timely manner from the IC, the case should be placed in an "inactive status" and the IC so advised. This information should be provided to not only the Key Contact, but also the requesting SI and the IC Executive Officer, to place the responsibility where it belongs. In cases where there are serious problems with a package, or, if after several requests and a wait of several weeks, needed information is not received, the package should be returned to the IC.

9. Publicize the steps in the process to the ICs, and length of time each one takes, emphasizing non-NIH, non-ISB processing times. Also, publicize the policy for priorities in processing packages within ISB. For example, renewals take precedence over new appointees.

This information is critical to establishing uniform methods for processing renewals and new appointee packages at NIH. It will also document that much of the required lead times, particularly for H-1Bs and O-1s, are not within NIH or ISB control, and are comparable to other organizations. FIC/ISB will need to insist on adherence to the steps in the process and established priorities once they are finalized and put up on the web, and reinforce to sponsors in particular that packages will be returned if they are seriously incomplete or start dates must change if they are not submitted without the proper lead time. Providing the reasons behind the lead times and for the priority of processing requests fosters a greater understanding among all those involved, and usually leads to improved compliance.

10. NIH's Office of General Counsel (OGC) should assign (and train) a lawyer to provide visa and immigration legal counsel to ISB. If NIH's General Counsel is unable to provide timely legal counsel, a law firm should be retained.

The availability of timely and responsive legal counsel should facilitate the processing of difficult and complex cases, provide justification for NIH policies and NIH/ISB decisions, and ensure NIH can be proactive regarding new regulations.

11. Approve/implement the current draft Manual Issuance which delegates Title 42 visiting program fellowship award authority to the Lab/Branch Chief level, paralleling the IRTA program.

5.2 ISB Organization and Staffing

Twelve recommendations deal with reorganizing ISB to clarify its connection with OIR, shifting the IS workload assignments to recognize product instead of customer differences, and address workload issues.

1. Move ISB to an organization with more commonality of mission (i.e., involved with the visiting program or provider of basic support services that are required for NIH programs to function and prosper).

Since the shift in the focus of FIC to international research, the missions of ISB and FIC are no longer well-aligned. ISB' s mission is focused on implementation of the NIH visiting program, and providing services associated with that program (visa issuance, etc.) to NIH. Examples of organizations which align more closely with ISB's mission include OIR and ORS. OIR and ISB share a mutual familiarity and official job duties regarding the NIH policies pertaining to visa processing and the NIH Visiting Program. Since it is believed that proximity influences an organization's ability to communicate internally, ISB should be collocated if at all possible with its "parent" organization, or, perhaps near OIR. This would maximize ISB's ability to operationalize and enforce NIH policies relating to the visiting program and visa regulation.

We do not recommend placing ISB within as IC. IC's are customers of ISB, and ISB must also enforce visa requirements with ICs, who have been known to "pressure" ISB to circumvent the regulations. Placing ISB within an IC would put undue pressure on the staff and could lead to compromise of requirements. ISB should remain separate from, and protected from, the potential from this type of pressure.

2. Keep ISB and visa processing and related functions as a centralized unit.

There are several reasons for keeping ISB and visa processing as a centralized unit. First, it is unlikely that Responsible Officer Authority for the J-1 program could be delegated to 20+ Alternate Responsible Officers in the ICs. If decentralization were sought for the visa processing function, DynCorp believes this would jeopardize consistency in policy and standardization in products, and sacrifice expertise in visa rules and regulations. The smaller ICs would not have the staff to dedicate to this function and would still have to look to an outside unit to process cases for them.

Second, as part of OIR, ISB will be part of a centralized unit that can assume ownership for the establishment of operational processes and for their continual reinforcement across NIH. This is the only way that over the long term, NIH policies with regard to visa processing can mature and result in better and consistent customer service.

3. In conjunction with moving ISB to another organization, consider whether it should be at a higher organizational level, e.g., an "office" rather than a branch.

A reorganization study should be conducted as a follow-up to this report that will evaluate whether or not ISB has the characteristics that warrant becoming an Office..

4. Restructure ISB to product teams to level the workloads among staff and facilitate more efficient processing. Product/service teams should consist of:

(1) J-1 visa team,
(2) H-1Bs, O-1s, and other visas team,
(3) Customer service team – conduct orientations, answer general questions (emails and phone calls), update the web site, conduct training for key cons, handle travel, and
(4) Support team – receptionist/secretary, office manager, data entry, etc.

In conjunction with restructuring to product teams, restructure training to start with J-1s, then move to H-1B,O-I team, and then to the customer service team. Final assignment would be based on branch needs, plus the individuals's preference.

DynCorp recommends that ISB restructure its existing Team structure to reflect where the greatest differences lie – i.e., in products, rather in customer groups, and to accommodate the preferences of ISs in handling certain types of visas and functions over others. DynCorp found that University of California at Berkeley, Johns Hopkins University and Duke University all use a product-centered team approach with excellent results. In addition, DynCorp feels that specialization should be built into the training of the ISs as well as in the structure/organization of the Branch in order to increase the efficiency of the office. ISs should have a limited case load in the beginning, learning, for example, J-1s as an introduction to visa processing and to the Visiting Program at NIH. After mastering J-1s, a new IS could then move to the H-1 O-1 team, and finally to the Customer Service Team. Advancement would then be based on both depth and breadth of knowledge, and follow a more logical career ladder.

5. Provide customer service training to ISs, particularly to the customer service team. Additional communications skills training should also be provided.

Best practice organizations provide on-going training in customer service skills to their front-line customer interface staff. This should result in improved customer service, a better "image" of ISB, and better communication of information. For example, DynCorp recommends that the ISs receive training on how to soften their approach to providing advice and guidance to the foreign scientist, and develop more sensitivity to the fact that English is a second language for many of their clients.

6. After other recommendations are implemented, review grading of IS positions, and ISB Branch Chief.

Given the depth and breadth of the work done by ISs, especially compared to other government organizations, grade levels should be reviewed by a position classification specialist. It may be helpful to utilize information on duties and skill levels of ISs in other government organizations, and to consider turnover rates and other factors that have a bearing on grade determination.

7. Improve ISB office administrative support. File supplies by type in specific areas, post locations, and do not change. Keep supplies re-stocked. Keep office machine fully operational. Hire a full-time receptionist for the office. Review the position grade level.

All of the ISs agree that the disorganization of their office wastes time and delays the processing of visa cases. If the current space continues to be occupied by ISB, then better office management should be developed including using the closets more efficiently for storage, ordering supplies in the right quantities, and having the office manager monitor quantities to ensure adequate levels are stocked.

Office management within ISB needs to continuously monitor the condition of the copying machines, fax machines and other equipment necessary to perform office duties. FIC management should assess the value in terms of processing time lost of having office machines that are not fully operational in a future study.

The cost of repeatedly retraining new temporary help, and the costs associated with misfilings and other errors attributable to use of temporaries is significant. The ability to hire a full-time employee may be impacted by the current grade level, given the complexity of the duties. A full-time NIH employee should bring more professionalism and dedication to the job, and save a significant amount of IS time over the year.

8. Have the NIH Print Shop print collated packages or switch to sending electronic files, rather than paper, to new foreign scientists.

Pre-arrival and orientation packages are currently put together within ISB, usually by the office staff and ISs, when they are needed, which is almost every day. This requires finding, or copying or printing all of the various parts of each package – which can take significant time. These packages could be printed and collated at the NIH Print Shop instead of using ISB copying machines, reducing the ISs time away from visa processing, or, switch to sending electronic files directly to the foreign scientist to avoid this requirement all together. This information can also be posted on the web.

9. ISB should be moved to larger quarters. Staff members should have a minimum of 100 sq. ft per person, preferably 125 to 150 sq. ft, and 200 sq. ft for the Branch Chief, with additional space for files. Ideally, space for larger group meetings should be readily available.

One of the biggest problems with the current space occupied by ISB is the lack of meeting space. The ISs have at least one and sometimes two or more, orientation meetings and other appointments

with foreign scientists, some of whom bring their families, in their offices. This is almost impossible in a six foot by eight foot cubicle. It certainly does not enhance the image of NIH and ISB is "serving the customer." There is no space provided in the office to allow for a private meeting of several people at one time. This situation not only discourages families from meeting with the ISs, it also does not permit the ISs to continue their practice of meeting every other Thursday to discuss issues and areas of mutual concern. In addition to this concern, current office space does not meet GSA standards.

10. To address IS workload issues, additional staffing should be provided. If NIH chooses NOT to automate visa processing, two to four additional IS FTE positions should be added. If NIH does automate visa processing, NIH should secure temporary help to bring down the backlog of cases to a manageable level.

Considering the current workload of the ISs, and considering staffing levels at other organizations, additional staffing is needed in ISB. In addition, over the past six years, the number of Visiting Fellows, and J-1's processed has increased almost 25%, and is likely to continue to increase. For example, NCI reports that 62% of their total Fellows population are Visiting Fellows (foreign scientists) holding visas. The recent removal of the H-1B cap for NIH will result in an increase in the number of H-1b visas that are processed by ISB. The exact number of additional staff or temporary staff needed depends on how many and which recommendations are implemented by NIH. In addition, if programs are changed or increased, NIH should evaluate the impact of ISB and the need for additional resources.

5.3 Visa Processing and Automation

It is our view that a profusion of unintegrated information tracking systems and use of numerous paper forms contribute to substantial inefficiencies in NIH's visa process. The following three recommendations, if implemented, would expedite the flow of paperwork between the ISs and ISB and to minimize the need to duplicate information on multiple forms and visa applications:

1. Develop and implement a single database and visa processing system which is linked to all the forms and letter or memo shells, so each data field item only needs to be entered once, and visa processing and form completion is automated, including the IAP-66.

As a first step to obtaining a new database system, NIH needs to conduct a comprehensive requirements analysis, and ensure that all people who will use system and system information participate (such as the ISB staff, Key Contacts, Personnel, etc.). Best practice would include following the methodology of the Carnegie Mellon Software Engineering Institute's Capability Maturity Model processes for requirements analysis. Additional data elements, analysis and reporting needs/capabilities (above the current system's) need to be clearly identified. The requirements analysis should also include a review of the current forms and letters used so as to consolidate and minimize the number needed. The new system should include ability to print directly onto the IAP-66 form, replacing the typewriter (by using an impact printer).

The new database and tracking system should be used by all ICs as well as FIC/ISB. In addition, it should automate the processes as much as possible to eliminate redundant entry of data onto multiple forms, and allow for electronic transfer/forwarding/tracking of files to the maximum extent possible (including scanning capability). The system should also provide one master tracking number for a Foreign Scientist/Visiting Fellow (e.g., FAES uses their own number in their health insurance system, so it is difficult to reconcile the FAES invoicing with the FPS system output). The system should also integrate with other NIH systems such as FPS2 to allow for transfer and sharing of data. It should have the capability to eventually allow for complete on-line completion of forms and transfer of data from the ICs to ISB.

NIH should review DOE's FACTS system to see if it can be tailored to suit NIH's needs, or if a new NIH-designed system is the best option. (As noted, other systems such as the Access-based Duke University system presents scalability issues.) It is estimated a new "from scratch" system could be designed and implemented in about a year and for about $300,000 to no more than $500,000.

2. Shift from one-on-one orientations to group orientations.

Most organizations plan start dates to coincide with the beginnings of pay periods, or, at the beginning of a week. Thus, they are also able to hold group orientations rather than one-on-one sessions.

If NIH conducted two group orientations a week, with the exceptional individual orientation if absolutely needed, it is estimated that approximately 500 to 1000 hours could be saved (approximately one-third to one-half an FTE).

3. Continue to provide one tax seminar per month utilizing a contracted tax professional. Expand the contract scope of work to include having this tax professional assist with determining tax treaty status and exemption from withholding eligibility in complex situations, for completion of the IRS Form 8233.

This was recognized as an excellent service and contracting for one seminar per month is a cost-effective way to provide this service. Since ISs complete the Form 8233, and tax treaty issues can be complex, they should have access to professional advice to avoid errors which can be costly to the visiting fellows.

5.4 Communications

Recommendations in this section are grouped under two main topic headings: General Communications and Web Site. There are ten recommendations dealing with improving general communications, and three recommendations dealing with improving information on the NIH Visiting Program and Visas provided via web pages.

5.4.1 General Communications Recommendations

1. Develop a simple, clear mission statement and internal marketing document for ISB and publicize this throughout NIH to the Senior Investigators, Branch Chiefs, Lab Chiefs, Scientific Directors, AOs and Key Contacts to help manage customer expectations. This document should include:

- **Information on the value that ISB brings to NIH's Intramural Research Program,**
- **Information on its services,**
- **Information on its processing priorities,**
- **Information on the rationale for lead times, including comparative processing times with other organizations**

An internal marketing document should be prepared for ISB that clarifies its role, policies and services provided and which documents its contribution to the NIH Visiting Program with statistical and budgetary information. This should help to eliminate some of the misperceptions about ISB's work, and help to manage customer expectations.

2. Develop and implement Service Level Agreements between ISB and the ICs which clarify rules and services to be provided, Customer Service standards, customer responsibilities, and problem resolution procedures.

A standard Service Level Agreement (SLA) for ISB services should be developed, using an good IT services model as a template. It should include a description of ISB services, service levels and customer service standards, as appropriate (e.g., processing times), ISB responsibilities, customer responsibilities, and problem resolution procedures. In general, the same SLA can be used for each IC, with minor modifications as needed.

3. For ICs which are particularly "problematic" (high percentage of packages arrive late, are incomplete, etc.), implement a "Partnering Initiative" effort with each IC and ISB.

In those instances where needed, a Partnering Initiative between FIC/ISB, OIR and the problematic IC should be implemented to reduce adversarial relationships and improve the implementation of the NIH Visiting Program and associated visa processing. The process should be facilitated by a professional facilitator knowledgeable in this process to ensure success.

4. After restructuring, institute and publicize a Branch policy regarding phone calls to ISs, reflecting the new organization.

After reorganization, general calls and questions will be handled by the Customer Service team. Calls on a specific active case would be directed to that team. This will minimize interruptions to visa processing and provide consistent and more timely response, improving "customer service." Publicizing this new approach will be critical.

5. Provide training to the ISs in oral and written communication skills, and also in customer service skills (e.g., dealing with difficult people, or call center skills).

Because so much of the information ISs provide is very complex, it is particularly critical that they have a sensitivity about how they communicate, both orally and in writing. In addition, if NIH wants to improve the level of customer service provided to all of NIH by ISB, training in these customer service skills must be provided to the staff. A training needs analysis to identify the most appropriate and needed training should be conducted to form a basis for an organization and individual training plans.

6. Develop "standard" prepared responses to the most frequently asked questions for use by ISs.

A data file of standard responses should be developed. This file should be searchable, so "answers" can be easily retrieved by searching on key words. This would minimize ISs recreating answers from scratch, and would also provide more standardized answers across ISB. Most ISs currently maintain individual folders containing this type of information, but they are not routinely shared.

7. Focus and limit the information provided to a foreign scientist at any one time, particularly if that information is being provided verbally. Provide written summary sheets or instructions, as appropriate, for main topic/action/issue areas so the foreign scientists don't have to remember everything they are told during a meeting. Also, provide this information on the webpage.

At appointments, ISs should give the foreign scientists only the information they need for that particular issue or action, rather than all possible information about everything. For example, a foreign scientist receiving an initial J-1 orientation probably doesn't need, and won't remember, information about 4th and 5th year extensions. In some instances, ISs provide "extra" information, and do not always provide written summary information. By providing written summary sheets or instructions, as appropriate, for main topic/action/issue areas, the foreign scientists don't have to remember everything they are told during a meeting. In addition to the written summaries or instructions, information should also be posted on the web page for future reference.

8. Continue the use of Ecomms to "push" information out to the Key Contacts.

While visa information related to visa characteristics, policies, and processing should be posted on the FIC and/or the OIR Web Site, this should not be the only media for providing information. Best practices indicate that the best results are achieved using multiple communication vehicles, especially for critical or time-sensitive information.

9. NIH should provide training on visa processing to Key Contacts and administrative staff in the ICs.

Training on visa packaging and on the visa process would be beneficial for the secretaries and Key Contacts in the ICs. Since the secretaries in the ICs are responsible for putting the paperwork together for the visa packages, they need to know why specific forms and dates are important. The training sessions could build on the existing training session being developed in NCI or it could be a new training module. DynCorp notes that the most successful and best received training programs are usually developed by a team which includes both adult learning specialists and subject matter experts (e.g., individuals with visa expertise).

10. Leverage existing forums to provide critical information on visa processing. Short training sessions should be developed for lab chiefs to cover basics only or updates on visa rules.

Identify appropriate forums and set up a schedule – e.g., quarterly or semi-annually or annually, for ISB to present critical information (new policies, new or changed regulations, reminders on lead times, etc.) to each group of customers which holds regularly scheduled meeting. In addition, the Visiting Fellows Committee could be used to gather questions which could be answered on the web site as FAQs or at VF meetings.

In addition to training sessions for clerical and administrative staff, a shorter training session might be helpful for lab chiefs who just need to know basics and who need to be kept up-to-date with pertinent visa rule changes.

5.4.2 Web-Specific Recommendations

1. Link the FIC and OIR webpages, or, if ISB is moved to OIR, place all information on the OIR site. There should also be a link to the Forms on the CIT web page.

If two web sites are maintained, the FIC Web Site should contain general NIH Visiting Program information (as it does now), but with a link to the OIR page. The FIC web pages would contain detailed information about visa and visa processing. The OIR web pages should be focused on the NIH Visiting program, and provide related policy and procedures information, with links to the FIC web pages for related visa information.

If ISB is moved to OIR, all Visiting Program and visa information can then be consolidated on one single site. If ISB is moved to another organization but not OIR, then provide links between the two web pages.

In either case, all needed forms should be available on-line, either on the applicable web page or through a link to the CIT Forms page.

2. Redesign the Visiting Program web page or pages (FIC/OIR) to include:

- **Table of Contents**

- **Detailed visa information**
- **Links to other sites**
- **Pre-arrival/Arrival and Orientation information, and**
- **Announcements and News**
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

The redesign should be accomplished utilizing a web design specialist and subject matter experts for content. Information should be written and presented in a manner targeted to the audience. NIH may want to consider having sections for foreign scientists and sections for NIH staff. The site(s) should be searchable so information can be easily located. Information should be presented in both tabular and text format. The site should include FAQs, and schedules of tax seminars and other scheduled meetings, e.g., group orientations.

To reinforce use of the web site, particularly after enhancement, ISs on the Customer Service Team can suggest and refer people with general questions to the Web Site, and suggest they call back if they still have questions after reading the posted information.

3. Do not implement a self-subscribed listserv or Bulletin Board/chat room for foreign scientists or an anonymous listserv from FIC ISB to the scientists at the present time.

Although self-subscribed Listservs are used by some organizations successfully to share information among visiting program personnel, and as a means for an International Center to identify current issues of concern, DynCorp does not believe it would serve NIH well to implement this approach at the present time, given the complexity of NIH's visiting program and the amount of misinformation currently extant among the visiting scientists. It is doubtful that ISB staff would have time to monitor the listserv and respond to issues until other recommendations, particularly relating to automation, are implemented, and the workload is therefore reduced..

5.5 Performance Measurement

NIH and ISB need to move into the modern realm of fact-based decision-making and performance management, applying the principles of GPRA to the Visiting Program and associated visa processing. To achieve this, NIH should implement the following two recommendations:

1. Send a report from the Executive Officer of FIC to the Executive Officer of each IC (preferably monthly, but no less than quarterly) showing the following data for all ICs, listed individually:

- **Number of visa request packages received**
- **Number and percent of packages incomplete**
- **Number of packages placed in "inactive status" due to missing information, and length of time waiting for information**
- **Number and percent of packages "late**"
- **ISB visa processing statistics and processing times**

This recommendation exemplifies the philosophy "what gets measured, gets managed." DynCorp believes that if the ICs know how many packages a month are being sent to FIC/ISB incomplete or late, they will take the necessary action to ensure that problems are corrected. At first glance, this may cause some consternation to staff in the ICs, especially the Key Contacts and AOs. But, if this information can provide the impetus for administrative procedures to be improved, the visa process will function more effectively. In addition, if this information indicates that IC staff need additional training, the long-term results should be a more efficient procedure that will free up time for both IC and ISB staff to focus on more substantive issues.

Data/information should be shown for several months or quarters, so that improvements in performance can be readily seen.

2. In conjunction with development of the new database and visa processing system, ensure that performance measurement can be accomplished easily. Develop a suite of performance measures and associated reports, as well as the capability for ad hoc reporting.

Performance measurement and data should include input and output measures covering visa processing. Examples of measures could include GPRA-type measures of effectiveness and efficiency, as well as in-process measures. Measures should allow for real-time resource allocations and adjustments, and include predictive measures. Examples might include:

- numbers of each new visa type and renewals that are processed by staff each year,
- the amount of time (in hours) it takes to process each type of visa,
- the amount of time taken by each step in a visa process,
- the numbers of packages that are received with errors or insufficient lead time,
- the numbers of J-1 visa holders who are renewed a third year, a fourth year or a fifth year,
- the number of J-1 visa holders who go home to fulfill the two year residency requirement,
- the number of J-1 visa holders who were converted to an H-1B or to an O-1 visa,
- a crosswalk between NIH visiting program participant categories and visa types,
- a crosswalk between countries represented at NIH and visa types,
- numbers of travel appointments, orientations, etc held a month,
- time expended in terms of preparatory time and appointment time for each type of appointment,
- in-process tracking of visa requests, e.g., how many visa applications are at INS, how long they have been there, etc.
- numbers of visas processed by month (to look at cycles and peaks and valleys of work)

In addition, the system should include reporting requirements associated with the visiting program, including tracking numbers of foreign scientists for the DOS (formerly USIA) annual report, and IAP-66's for DOS reporting.